

# From Blackmail to Treason



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# FROM BLACKMAIL TO TREASON

Political Crime and Corruption  
in France, 1920-40



*Translated by*

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## INTRODUCTION

'CRIME doesn't pay,' says the tag. The screen-writer, the author, the journalist, the editor, the publisher would reply that, on the contrary, there is nothing that pays so well. The years since the war have seen a flood of crime films, crime novels, crime plays, crime strips, memoirs by famous detectives and stories of famous criminals, and the public shows no signs of being sated with them.

There is, however, a startling gap in these chronicles. No one has yet attempted to tell the story of a series of events, running over though they were with scandals and bloodshed, which took place in France during the ten years that preceded its liberation from the Germans. In those years, the Sûreté Nationale unmasked and the courts began to get to grips with an entirely new sort of criminal. The gangsters in this great gang spied and bombed and killed in the name of honour and patriotism, while their leaders, prudently taking cover behind their strong-arm men, diverted suspicion to the police, who, they screamed, were guilty alike of the treason, the terrorism and the murders.

The get-out is a classic one in a humbler sphere. It is the trick generally, and often successfully, employed by the common pickpocket when he shouts, 'Stop thief!'—to turn on-lookers against the policeman who has just surprised him in the act of exploring a stranger's pockets.

The conspiracy that forms the subject of this book is on quite a different plane. The coolness and cold-bloodedness of its planning, the ruthlessness of its action, its dramatic incidents and coincidences and its extraordinary repercussions, no less than the number of actors and victims involved, were such as no novelist would ever have imagined.

It is natural enough that the extremist press, which must bear the responsibility for it, should have begun by doing its

best to conceal the extent of the menace under its sarcasms ; that under the German occupation it should have gloried in it, and that today what remains of this press should want nothing better than to see the whole affair forgotten. That is, however, no reason for keeping silence. The scope and dimensions of the conspiracy have earned it a place in the annals of crime. The facts have been twisted ; not to set them right would be to connive at their falsification and the hateful hoaxes that will be recounted here played a not unimportant part in the downfall of the Third Republic.

This melancholy story might be difficult to understand without a few prefatory words of theoretical explanation. Pundits will often assert in France that there are police *and* police. That sort of knowing talk nowadays merely reveals ignorance. The distinction that once existed between special police and ordinary police no longer corresponds with any recognized classification. The French police force of today is an instrument of social protection that allows no distinction to be made between one sort of job and another.

Fouché, Napoleon's dreaded police chief, naturally won not a few disciples with his theories on the matter. But though he was a Minister he could hardly pretend, even in his own time, to know more than a limited aspect of the job he claimed to teach. The security of the individual citizen, which is after all the essential task of the police, was the least of considerations with him. His powers and the means at his disposal were almost unlimited, but it was difficult for any coherent method of organization, comparable to those which are regarded as essential today, to emerge during the revolutionary period. Yet despite all the last century's developments in the juridical, administrative and scientific fields, there are still many people who confound the normal working of a modern police force with the minor bits of sharp practice on which the Emperor's chief of police prided himself. Thus he assumed personal responsibility for what we

should regard today as an abominable piece of spying, when he congratulated himself on having secretly recruited the Emperor's own private secretary as an informer, at a salary of twenty-five thousand francs a month. He looked on this achievement as a stroke of genius.

'All the energy and intelligence of a Minister who is a statesman ought to go into the running of the special police,' he wrote. 'The rest can easily be left to a few head clerks. The responsibilities of a special police force are enormous, whether it has to do its job within the framework of a representative government, which is incompatible with despotic action, when it will leave sedition-mongers legal weapons to conspire with, or whether it is operating in the service of a more authoritarian régime.'

These assertions may perhaps have been valid when they were written, but if Fouché had lived in the century of the hold-up and the tommy-gun, the electric drill and the private airfield, he might have been forced to admit that the zeal of a head clerk will not always suffice to protect law-abiding citizens against the permanent threat of common law crime. The French defeat of 1940 and the sanguinary internal imbroglios that preceded it would almost as certainly have led him to revise his opinion on the risks of 'deliberately leaving sedition-mongers weapons to conspire with'.

Nearer our own time, a French Prime Minister, who was his own Minister of the Interior, asserted the directly contrary doctrine of the supremacy of the common law. He was Georges Clemenceau, and he was speaking on the establishment of local squads of the Criminal Investigation department.

'The only kind of police a democracy can tolerate,' he told the Chamber of Deputies in 1907, 'is the Criminal Investigation department, the police whose business it is to prevent crime, and to protect the ordinary citizen, and it is no tool of despotism. Its job is to safeguard freedom. Well, it is just that force that is inadequate today.'

In 1908, to make his intentions even clearer, he circulated to Public Prosecutors and Prefects an order countersigned by the Minister of Justice, Aristide Briand, in which it was laid down that officers of the Criminal Investigation department were strictly forbidden to engage in inquiries of an administrative and particularly of a political character. These instructions are still in force today, and they expressly prohibit any kind of police interference in politics.

The activities that Fouché classified under the general heading of 'special police work' concerned espionage, the lower levels of diplomatic and political action, and provocation and punitive action, to which, in defiance of the rule of law, he set no limits. Under his influence and that of some of his successors, such activities could and indeed did go to the length of murder. The policing of the towns and the countryside was a matter that interested nobody but the local authorities, the various detective forces and the *gendarmérie*, who were described as the 'common police'.

Clemenceau's enemies at one time labelled him 'France's No. 1 Cop'. But he would give no sort of official recognition to any police but those concerned with the maintenance of order and the protection of the man in the street. Clemenceau's attitude was proof of the liberalism of a republic that had known thirty-five years of stability, and his view and Fouché's are obviously poles apart. It is therefore difficult to understand how the Criminal Investigation department that Clemenceau founded could ever be confused with a political police working at pistol-point for political ends.

That, however, was the extraordinary picture of French administration and French justice that a remorseless propaganda campaign, based on arguments boundless in their absurdity, managed to imprint on masses of minds in France in the period between the two wars. From 1920 to 1940 an avalanche of print, in newspapers and books, conspired to depict the French police to the world as a set of scoundrels in the pay of foreign powers, exclusively concerned with dirty

political jobs and capable, under the protection of a servile judiciary, of the most loathsome crimes. Léon Daudet and Charles Maurras, members of the French Academy and apostles of 'hundred per cent nationalism', did not call the Sûreté by its name when they wrote of it. For them it was the Den, the Cave, the Thieves' Kitchen, the Sewer of the rue des Saussaies.

The triumph of the royalist cause apparently necessitated a complete rewriting of history. The good royalist must believe that Dreyfus was guilty. He must also believe that Léon Daudet's son was murdered by three high officials of the Sûreté on the orders of the French President. For him Mangin, the great general of the First World War, and Maginot, War Minister and creator of the Maginot Line, had both been poisoned by the French police on Germany's orders; the General had been disposed of with a cup of drugged coffee and the Minister by poisoned oysters which had been specially prepared for him. In the royalist view, Gorguloff, who murdered President Doumer, may have been mad, but he was put up to the job by the police and the Freemasons. Finally, the swindling financier Stavisky, and Judge Prince, who failed to stop his swindles in time, had both been murdered on the orders of the Prime Minister and the Public Prosecutor.

The mystery is how such stories were ever put over. The Philippe Daudet case was the start of the whole affair. How were sensible people ever induced to credit the royalist theory, that the destinies of France were tied up with the death of a mere boy? How could anyone swallow the assertion that a French President, a Prime Minister and a whole company of world-renowned statesmen had got together with informers, officers and high officials of the police to organize the murder or to hush up the accidental death of the boy? How could it be imagined that simply from fear of the police a crowd of experts, lawyers and witnesses to character had been persuaded without a single exception to cover up the

crime and that the entire judiciary had played in with them?

Yet Anatole France said of the Philippe Daudet affair that it worried him as much as it fascinated him. 'Was it a suicide or a murder?' he said. 'If it really was a murder, it was a monstrous thing to kill a boy of fourteen just because of his father's opinions.'

It would indeed have been monstrous. But it is even more lamentable that French journalists finally succeeded in creating the impression abroad that the French State knew no other means of government than the suppression of its opponents, even if they were mere adolescents.

I am neither a polemicist nor an historian, or even a pre-ordained detective. But I can claim to have served for nearly forty years on the staff of the Sûreté Générale (later the Sûreté Nationale). Thus I knew from the inside the Cave, the Den or the Thieves' Kitchen of the rue des Saussaies.

I came to the job late, and I brought nothing with me when I started but the indispensable physical and mental balance, plus a boundless appetite for work. It was slender enough equipment to make one's way in an arduous career, where unsuspected talents reveal themselves at every turn. I had my first training in the tough school of the Criminal Investigation department's provincial squads. I served in the Army from 1915 to 1919. I was then appointed to the headquarters of the Sûreté Générale and there I successively mounted rung after rung of the police ladder till I achieved the most coveted of posts and of distinctions.

Since I have never pretended to do anything more than serve the common good to the best of my abilities in the profession I had deliberately chosen, perhaps I shall be allowed to say, at the risk of appearing immodest, that I do not feel I have been an incapable or an unsuccessful official.

In the course of these forty years of fighting crime, both in the national and international fields, I have been responsible for bringing thieves, swindlers, burglars, forgers, gang-



sters of every kind, and not a few authentic spies, to book for their misdeeds. There are few celebrities in the world of crime whom I have not known, whether it was as a detective on their trail or as head of the squad hunting them, or as headquarters organizer of the hunt.

In the old days the handling of the tommy-gun was by no means—on the part of the police—an everyday affair. With nothing but my Dalloz automatic in my pocket, I thought for a long time, like most of my colleagues, that this famous police work which everyone thought so secret was, when it came down to brass tacks, neither as risky nor as secret as was generally believed. But I had to change my mind when under my very eyes I saw the activities of the groups of whom I shall be writing later on, taking shape, building up and growing ever clearer; groups who, though their descriptions, their techniques, and the ends they were out for fitted in with the general picture of the underworld, did not belong to any known category. It was only then, realizing the passivity of an ill-informed public opinion and sensing the extent of the peril that lay ahead, that I began to understand the formidable significance of the career to which my life was devoted.

It is of course true that the posts that I held at the various stages of my career gave me a front-row view of the most important events of the time. But sweeping though that view was, it was not unlimited, and I am sure that there must have been many dark corners that escaped me. I have had occasion to gauge, in the course of my experiences, the distance that separates fact from imagination and from fiction. So I shall talk of nothing but what I know and shall not attempt to lay down the law on professional matters.

Trusting in my memory and tranquil in my conscience, I shall confine myself to replacing in their proper setting some of the more sensational and significant incidents among those with which my career brought me into contact.

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## The Bogus Mystery

THE GREY winter's afternoon made the fusty passages of the Sûreté headquarters in the rue des Saussaies seem even colder, darker and dirtier than they usually did. Since it was a Saturday too, the officers on duty were few.

I had only arrived back in Paris that morning from a long-drawn-out job in the provinces. It had left me with a bulky report to write, and I was running up the staircase that leads to the offices of the Criminal Investigation department when I heard the voice of the constable on duty calling after me.

'Hi, Super! The chief's ordered every available officer to report to him urgently in the boulevard Beaumarchais, near the rue du Chemin Vert crossing. He's there with an observation party.'

'That's very nice, but I've got another job on my hands. D'you know what it's about?'

'He didn't say. I think he's after some awkward character hiding in a shop up there. He's ordered the place to be put under supervision, anyway. I don't believe the chaps up there know any more than I do.'

'Who's gone up there?'

'The Chief Inspector, the Divisional Super, two others and three or four inspectors. The Préfecture's going to send some men up too.'

'In that case they've got more than enough for the job. I shouldn't worry anyone else if I were you. I'm going to my office. If anyone wants me, give me a ring.'

'Very good.'

I thought no more about the mysterious order and worked

on till the evening at my report and other jobs I found on my desk. When I questioned my colleagues who had come back from the boulevard Beaumarchais, they said rather shamefacedly that nothing had come of the operation. They hadn't seen a thing, heard a thing, or understood a thing. They obviously thought they'd been sent on a fool's errand on the strength of some phony tip-off.

As it happens, they could not have been further from the truth. A tragedy had taken place almost under their noses : it had brushed past them, but they had never noticed it. The fact that they had fallen down on their job was not only to be a burden to them in the future ; it was to cast discredit, completely undeserved, on the whole of the Paris police force. It was mere professional common sense that kept me, this time, out of the ranks of those who were to be dragged through the mud ; but I lost nothing by waiting.

The fateful day was 24 November 1923. The chain of events that was to produce an echo throughout France began at about half-past eleven in the morning with the appearance of a young customer in an unpretentious bookshop : they ended at half-past six that evening in the operating theatre of a big Paris hospital, where the same young man died under an anaesthetic with a revolver bullet in the head.

The owner of the bookshop, which was at No. 46 boulevard Beaumarchais, not far from the Place de la Bastille, was in his forties at the time. He was a former revolutionar, who had settled down with the years. It was getting on for noon when a young man, whom he did not know, came into the shop and asked for a pocket edition of one of the classics. The bookseller found he had not got it in stock but offered to get it in an hour or two, and the young man agreed to come back for it in the afternoon.

In spite of the difference in their ages, the bookseller and his unknown customer were soon talking as if they had known each other all their lives. As he was on the point of leaving, the young man yielded to what was apparently an irresistible

impulse. The tone of his voice changed, and in abrupt, staccato sentences he parted with a secret that had clearly been weighing on his mind.

'I've come up from the provinces to do a big job,' he said. 'I've only been in Paris a day or two. I've seen the comrades of *Le Libertaire*' (this was an anarchist paper) 'and one or two of the chiefs too. I've got to kill someone. I've got the necessary—look here,' and he pulled a miniature automatic pistol out of his pocket.

The bookseller was wary enough not to be taken aback. He knew that there are no chiefs in the anarchist movement and the silliness of the remark by itself might have given him a good laugh. But the wild look and the resolute air of his young customer alarmed him. He tried to calm him down. 'It's no use arguing; the job's got to be done today.' These were the young man's last words as he left the shop.

The whole scene was over in less than a quarter of an hour, and it left the bookseller very puzzled. Just what was he to do? One of his nearest neighbours was a divisional superintendent of the Préfecture of Police, a M. Faralicq, and among his customers was a senior official of the Sûreté, a M. Lannes, to whose home he had recently delivered quite a big order. He did not like the idea of reporting his experience to the Préfecture, of which he hardly had pleasant memories. On the other hand, if he were to cover himself in case of anything happening, he had got to take some precautions, or at least get some advice. So he compromised with his revolutionary principles to the extent of dropping in on the Sûreté official at lunch time.

M. Lannes was just sitting down at the table, and the bookseller told him of his strange customer's disturbing behaviour. He remembered to say that the young man had promised to come back at four o'clock, but was so agitated himself that the description he gave of his visitor was not only incomplete but inaccurate. He described the young man as between eighteen and twenty years old and as wearing a

light brown raincoat. He was mistaken on both points. In fact, the young man was only fourteen and a half, though he looked a good deal older, and the colour of his raincoat was a good deal nearer light grey than light brown.

No sooner had he ended his story than the Sûreté official dashed back to his office to warn the Commissioner, who in turn gave the alarm to the Commissioner of the city police, M. Paul Guichard, who was the responsible officer in Paris. Then, in order to provide against any eventuality till more could be done, he hurriedly got together a protection squad, in the way I have already described.

By three o'clock the two groups of hastily-mobilized officers, those from the Sûreté Générale and those from the Préfecture of Police, had made contact off the boulevard Beaumarchais. All told, they numbered eleven men. At the same time, the Commissioner of the Sûreté decided, as an additional precaution, to warn three prominent public men whose lives might conceivably be in danger from the type of hot-head the bookseller had described. These three were the President, the Prime Minister, and M. Léon Daudet, editor-in-chief of the Royalist newspaper *L'Action Française*, which preached violence in its columns every day. The following memorandum, intended for the Prefect of Police, was therefore typed in quadruplicate and dispatched urgently to him and the three addressees:

24 November 1923: Informant received warning anarchist planning violent action Paris today. Expected between three and four o'clock at bookshop which is second house in boulevard Beaumarchais after rue du Chemin Vert. Sûreté Générale has provisionally dispatched inspectors. Suspect is medium build, aged 18 to 20, light brown overcoat, big feet. Is armed.

Three other protection squads were organized by the Préfecture of Police and posted at the homes of the addressees to whom the warning was sent.

If a job of supervision is to be carried out efficiently, its participants must, in the nature of things, remain invisible until the moment has come for them to act. There must be as few of them as possible and their dress and physical appearance must be wholly inconspicuous. Also they should have been trained to work together as a team and should know all the opportunities for concealment that a street in a big town affords.

There are important jobs that a foreman can do better than a qualified engineer, a sergeant-major than a general, a plain-clothes inspector than the Prefect of Police himself. A job of supervision carried out by eleven men picked at random without any preparation ceases to be a job of supervision, even though every one of the eleven may be an officer. It is posting a guard. They might just as well put on uniform.

In the conditions under which it had been organized, the operation was open to every sort of unexpected development. The Commissioner of the Sûreté was a former official of the Public Works Department. If, instead of organizing personally an expedition whose full repercussions he had no means of guessing, he had passed on the information to a responsible departmental head; if he had allowed him at his leisure to pick two or three old-timers off the beat, either at the Sûreté or at the Préfecture, maybe the affair would have turned out differently. There would at least have been a chance that it might.

That was not the end of it, however. When he took into his own hands a job which under normal routine would have been dealt with by a subordinate, the Commissioner of the Sûreté was doing something more. He was raising a minor criminal episode to Ministerial level, to the level of the secretariat of the Minister of the Interior, who was his direct superior, and was turning it into an affair of State. His decision was not only a piece of professional incompetence, it opened the way to a blurring of responsibilities. Little won-

der that when the moment came the double error was exploited to the full by the habitual vilifiers of the police.

Supposing things had worked out as planned, the young anarchist would have been discreetly picked up when he returned to the bookshop at four o'clock and no less discreetly followed when he left it. At the appropriate moment he would have been arrested rapidly and without any fuss by two powerful and well-trained officers. The fact that he was carrying a firearm would have permitted them to take him into custody and detain him long enough for the necessary inquiries to be made and further decisions to be reached. It would have been a perfectly regular, everyday police job.

The young man came back at the appointed time and went into the bookshop, where there was a fellow-customer who was later able to identify him. Unfortunately, he had already spotted the police precautions.

'So they're here already, are they?' he said, pointing to the detectives bunched together outside. 'Well, they won't get me. I'll fire into the lot of them.'

The bookseller tried once more to calm his customer. He told him it was not only dangerous, it was ridiculous to do anything violent with the odds so much against him. The young man hesitated, then gave ground.

'But what are the comrades going to say if I don't do as I promised?' he objected. 'They'll say I was a coward.'

'Don't let that worry you,' the bookseller replied. 'It's they who are the cowards, pushing you into doing something they daren't do themselves. Look, here's a bit of money, enough to pay for your ticket and get back home. Do your best to give them the slip when you leave here. For heaven's sake, don't play the fool—go home.'

It was about twenty-past four when the budding anarchist came out of the bookshop. Not one of the inspectors waiting on the pavement opposite had recognized him, either when he went in or when he left. As ill-luck would have it, between three and four o'clock their attention had been drawn by a

number of previous customers, whose appearance was nearer the description they had been given. More than one mistake had already been made, so no one followed the young man. And turning to the right, he went off alone towards his death.

At half-past four he hailed a taxi in the Place de la Bastille, jumped into it, after having looked round him with a worried air, and told the driver to go to the Cirque Medrano. The shortest way to the Cirque from the Bastille is by the Place de la République and the boulevard Magenta, and setting out on this route the driver drove without incident for some minutes. He had just passed the crossing of the rue Lafayette and the boulevard Magenta when he heard a sharp report, like that produced by a missile hitting a plate-glass window or by a tyre-burst.

The driver pulled up, got out and went round to the back of the taxi to look at the tyres. Then he looked inside the cab, noticed that his fare appeared to have collapsed, opened the door and started back. There was a slight smell of smoke inside, and when the policeman on point duty, whom he called, came up with another officer, they found the young man's face was covered with blood. There was a deep wound in his right temple and he was at his last gasp. At his feet lay a revolver and in the pockets of his overcoat were two clips of cartridges.

Three witnesses as well as the driver had heard the shot and gave their names to the policemen. They were a shop-keeper, his shop assistant and a woman passer-by, all of whom were later to make statements at the local police station of St Vincent de Paul. In all, that is to say, there were six witnesses of the suicide.

The two policemen got into the taxi and drove with the wounded youth to the Lariboisière Hospital a few hundred yards away. The hospital attendants who took charge of him found no personal papers on him or any other means of identification. They tried vainly to restore him to consciousness with injections, but he died an hour later.





A mile-and-a-half away on the boulevard Beaumarchais the inspectors and the superintendents of the Sûreté and the Préfecture of Police were continuing their conscientious sentry-go outside the bookshop. At about half-past five, one of the policemen, worried that nothing had happened after all their waiting, went into the shop on the pretext of inquiring for a book, in the hope of getting the bookseller to give himself away. It was too late; the bookseller was completely impassive, and the officer left the shop no wiser than when he had gone in. Knowing nothing of what had happened on the boulevard Magenta, cut off from the source on whose information they were working, and operating, as they were, in a complete void, the officers of the observation squad progressively abandoned their posts from six o'clock onward. And as they were doing so, the young man for whom they had been watching was being placed, an unidentified corpse, in the mortuary of the Lariboisière Hospital.

His suicide was almost certainly the climax of a long period of over-excitement which could hardly have passed unobserved by those around him. It was fairly obvious that he came from a social sphere where his disappearance would soon be reported. And, in fact, it took very little time for light to be shed, first on his identity and then on the origins of the story.

The next day, Sunday, 25 November, the Paris newspapers carried the following item in their News in Brief columns:

A young man, apparently about twenty years old, shot himself in the head in a taxi in the boulevard Magenta at five p.m. yesterday. He was taken to the Lariboisière Hospital, where his condition is stated to be grave.

This inconspicuous item of news probably aroused a moment's curiosity in some readers, a pang of anxiety in others. But one woman, the mother of a boy who had disappeared five days before, knew instinctively that it concerned her. Sending the family doctor ahead of her, she went

to the hospital that afternoon with her husband, the editor-in-chief of *L'Action Française*, and identified the body as that of her son.

A medical examination was carried out on the spot and left no doubt that the death was a suicide; the father, who was himself a doctor, did not attempt to contest this verdict. Kneeling beside the dead boy, all that he said to betray his sorrow was a single sentence of reproach: 'Unhappy child! He hasn't spared us anything.'

He declined the post-mortem which the house surgeon had offered to carry out and next day went through the legal formalities necessary to obtain a burial permit in such a case.

As soon as the body had been brought home, the question of funeral arrangements came up. The Catholic Church does not permit religious ceremonies for a suicide unless it has been legally established that the victim was of unsound mind. The family doctor therefore certified in the appropriate manner that for some time past the boy's mind had in fact been disturbed. He had grown too fast and had become unbalanced as the result of the abnormal development of certain phenomena of puberty, which the doctor had previously observed. Permission was therefore given for a religious funeral, which took place on Wednesday, 28 November, in the presence of a large number of mourners, who included some of the most distinguished figures in the Government.

In order to explain the suddenness of his son's death to his large circle of friends and acquaintances, the father had attributed it to acute meningitis. He invented a number of painful and impressive details and described at length the sufferings the boy had gone through on his deathbed. No one would have thought of calling these stories anything but pious and pardonable falsehoods if the memory of the dead boy had not a little later been dragged through the mud by a series of slanderous conjectures.

We have already seen that when the budding anarchist told the bookseller of his murderous intentions on the morning of 24 November he said he had been in Paris for two days and had already met some of the 'comrades'. If we are to understand the headlong rush of events which was soon to follow, with all its extravagant repercussions, we had better go back a little, look at the behaviour of the dead boy and try to reconstitute his time-table between his disappearance from his parents' home and his appearance in the bookshop in the boulevard Beaumarchais. If we do so, we shall find that, towards the end of the story anyway, there are very few gaps. The most outstanding are the hours between 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. on Thursday the 22nd, the night of Friday to Saturday, and the period between 11.30 a.m. and 4 p.m. on the Saturday. It is true, of course, that the young man was no sort of stranger in Paris and had many contacts there. In view of the complete lack of clues at the start, the police inquiry must be considered a thorough and conclusive job of work.

As a schoolboy, back in 1921, the boy had already run away for several days to Marsilles, whence he was sent back by a friend. At the beginning of 1923 he was guilty of two similar escapades in quick succession, neither of which lasted long. He was not yet fourteen, but he was already a man in appearance, and the family doctor was seriously worried. He warned the boy's parents that these repeated flights seemed to him to point to an epileptic disturbance and that this was a danger that must be reckoned with.

The fourth and last crisis the boy was to go through must have been smouldering within him for some days when on Monday, 19 November, he wrote in a school exercise book a sort of prose poem in which he hymned the joys which he saw awaiting him:

Farewell, my old home. Farewell, my parents. No one will understand why I have gone. No one will ever guess

the feelings that have driven me to this. Only two days more and, like a bird taking wing for the first time, I shall leave for faraway lands, for new experiences, for whatever chance may offer.

Obviously, on the eve of his flight, the boy was already living in a kind of dream world. Equally obviously, there was nothing about him of the mentality of the terrorist; his attitude was rather that of a young adventurer, eager for the wide open spaces and the unknown.

The next morning, Tuesday, 20 November, he had left his home as usual by eight in the morning. He was carrying a little travelling bag and had in his pocket about 1,800 francs, which was a considerable sum at what was then the rate of exchange. Instead, however, of going to school, he went to the Gare St Lazare, took the train to Havre and went to the Hotel Bellevue, where he registered under the name of Pierre Bouchamp, electrician, and spent the afternoon reading in his room, then went early to bed.

On Wednesday 21 November, he woke up with a violent headache. He went to church in the morning, and after a simple lunch, told the hotel porter that he wanted to take a boat for Canada. In the afternoon he made inquiries about this, but ran into insurmountable difficulties. He had not enough money to pay for his passage, nor could he sign on as a member of the crew, though he gave himself out to be an electrician. The only hope was to try his luck at Cherbourg, which the floor waiter advised him to do, though the result seemed rather problematic, for he would have to produce some sort of proof of who he was, identity papers or a passport, which would be closely scrutinized.

Faced with these unexpected obstacles, the boy was at a loss, and from that moment seems to have been drawn to the idea of suicide. He trailed through the streets of the town and finally went into a gunsmith, but the man refused to sell him a revolver. Then he came back to his hotel and wrote a

number of letters, including one to his parents in which he told them what he had decided to do.

On Thursday the 22nd he woke up early and in an entirely different frame of mind. He tore up the letters he had written the previous day and told the porter and his wife that he had given up the idea of his journey and was going back to Paris. He still seemed worried, though, and they had the impression that the young traveller had something on his conscience. They were sufficiently curious about him after he had left to gather up the pieces of his last letter, which he had thrown away, and fit them together. It was only later, when they read the story in the papers, that they handed it over to the authorities, but its genuineness was never disputed. This is what it said:

My darling parents—please, please forgive me for the horrible distress I've caused you, I'm just a good-for-nothing and a thief. I return the money I haven't spent, and I beg you to forgive me. I hope my repentance will wash out this stain. By the time you get this, I shall be dead. Goodbye, I love you more than anything in the world.

Your despairing child Philippe.

The young man paid his bill, left the hotel, picked up a taxi and made a tour of the port, then drove to the station and took the train for Paris, where he arrived about one o'clock.

The next trace we find of him is at the offices of the anarchist paper, *Le Libertaire*, at 9 rue Louis Blanc. He introduced himself by his Christian name of Philippe and said he had come from Havre and had been converted to anarchism. Nobody asked him any questions. He contributed 200 francs to the funds of the paper, and the sum was recorded under the heading, which he dictated himself, of 'donation from X, for violent action'. He was in very high spirits, and asked where he could get hold of a bomb or a revolver. He was enthralled with his new friends, spent the rest of the afternoon helping them to put the latest edition of the paper into

wrappers for the post, had dinner with them and went on with them afterwards to a meeting of young Communists. Finally he accepted a bed which one of the comrades offered him for the night.

On Friday the 23rd he left his travelling bag with this comrade and told him that he could do what he liked with it. His next call was on Frédéric Rouquette, the explorer who was well known for his writings from the northern wilds. He described himself as an orphan and asked for help to go to Canada or Alaska. Once more the thirst for adventure had gained ascendancy in his mind. But once more he got 'no' for an answer, so he was thrown back on his friends of *Le Libéraire*, at whose office he appeared again at about half-past eleven.

Once more he was their guest at table: he was back again at his idea of carrying out an act of violence and pestered them to know who was the most important person he could assassinate 'in the interest of the Cause'. He went out after lunch, and when he came back about three o'clock he pulled an automatic from his pocket and said, 'Now my mind's made up'. He wrote a note for his mother on the edge of one of the tables: he put no address on the envelope but told the comrade who had received him the previous day: 'My name's going to be talked about, and then you'll know who I am.' He deposited 100 francs of the 140 that remained to him and left about five o'clock.

From then on we lose track of him till midnight, when he appeared at the Grenier de Gringoire, a night haunt in the rue des Abbesses which had a regular clientèle from among *Le Libéraire's* circle. As he was short of money, he borrowed thirty-five francs from a comrade who was a singer and left saying he was going to sleep at a hotel, but no trace of him was ever found in any hotel register, either under his own name or under the pseudonym which he had used at Havre.

On Saturday the 25th, he came back to the Grenier de Gringoire about ten-thirty in the morning in quest of a little

money, for he was now completely penniless and no longer had the face to go to the rue Louis Blanc. He was seen wandering about the neighbourhood till about eleven o'clock, trying to sell his overcoat to one of the local second-hand clothes shops. At half-past eleven he turned up at the bookshop in the boulevard Beaumarchais, which he left just before twelve and where he returned at four o'clock.

And at twenty to five, in the boulevard Magenta, he shot himself in the head.

\* \* \*

The anarchist movement in France in the 'twenties had shrunk to a little minority of cranks and outlaws scattered over greater Paris and the bigger industrial towns. In Paris, the best known of them met at the offices of *Le Libertaire*, which consisted of three sparsely furnished rooms on the ground floor, one of which served as both an outer office and a library. The paper had a weekly circulation of a few thousand copies.

In 1924, *Le Libertaire*—which is still appearing today—was being run by Henri Faure, with two comrades named Lecoïn and Vidal on the business side. The editor-in-chief, André Colomer, was a university man with an arts degree, and was assisted by his wife, who went under the name of Hauteclair. Colomer, who had a talent as a major orator, was the dominating force. He read and adapted whatever articles unpaid contributors sent to the paper. The bookseller of the boulevard Beaumarchais, M. Le Flaouter, a former anarchist sympathizer, had been one of these occasional contributors, and now and then had given lectures for the paper. He was, however, a rebel by temperament and always refused to join any anarchist group. Later he was converted to Communism and parted from the anarchists, whose ideas he lost no opportunity of disputing.

Among the people to be seen regularly at the rue Louis Blanc were Jean Gruffy, a former deserter who was then an

out-of-work painter or sculptor and his mistress, Marcelle Weill. Germaine Berton, 'the Black Virgin',<sup>1</sup> could also be seen there before her arrest for the murder of Marius Plateau in January 1923, as could many others whose names appeared in the court news. Part of this circle, with the addition of a few dope-fiends, prostitutes and perverts, used to gather every night at the Grenier de Gringoire, a Montmartre night club run by Charles d'Avray, who was later manager of more than one Paris theatre. D'Avray was more of a poet than an anarchist, his kindness was inexhaustible, and every night he used to sing his favourite number, which was a veritable anarchist manifesto:

*Stranger flying from justice stern,  
Your race is none of my concern :  
When of danger near you learn,  
Come to me.*

*An anarchist since long ago,  
Of every law I am the foe—  
Except the sacred one to give  
Asylum to the fugitive.*

And indeed in the Grenier de Gringoire circle, anyone with a hard-luck story was helped out as far as could be managed, and no one dreamed of asking questions of a stranger who wanted a bed.

It was Faure, Vidal and Colomer who had received the budding anarchist at the rue Louis Blanc on 22 November. It was Gruffy who had offered him a night's rest in the room he shared with Marcelle Weill. And it was Charles d'Avray who had lent him thirty-five francs to get himself a hotel room.

We shall probably never know for certain who sent him to

<sup>1</sup> On 22 January, 1923, Germaine Berton broke into the offices of *L'Action Française* and as a belated protest against the execution of Raoul Villain, the murderer of Jean Jaurés, shot dead Marius Plateau, secretary of the Camelots du Roi.



the bookseller in the boulevard Beaumarchais. There is a possible link between Gruffy and Le Flaouter, for Le Flaouter had given hospitality to Germaine Berton when she came to him with a former nun of the St Lazare convent who had previously stayed with Marcelle Weill. That may have led Gruffy to think of Le Flaouter, and to mention his name to his young guest, though he never owned up to it.

But it is just as probable that the editorial staff of *Le Libertaire*, a little anxious, whatever they might pretend to be, were not sorry to pass on their overwrought and possibly compromising recruit to their lapsed comrade Le Flaouter. For that matter, the address of the bookshop, with Le Flaouter's name, appeared in the advertisement columns of the Communist daily *L'Humanité* and other Left-wing organs. The question is not very important. It is only mentioned in order to clarify the circumstances thanks to which the anarchists, too, were able to identify the suicide of the boulevard Magenta.

To return to the immediate sequels of the tragedy: Le Flaouter, who had heard nothing of what had happened to his strange customer after he had left his shop on Saturday, scanned the papers closely on Sunday morning. He found the little news item easily enough. The same afternoon he went to the Lariboisière Hospital just before the parents arrived and recognized the body without hesitation as that of his unknown customer. Since, however, he could not put a name to him, he made no statement at the hospital registry.

The editorial staff of *Le Libertaire* were no less curious as to the fate of the strange comrade whom they had never seen again. They too had noticed the news item about the shot youth in the boulevard Magenta. But what really aroused Henri Faure's suspicions was the article by Charles Maurras in *L'Action Française* on Tuesday, 27 November, which announced the death after a short illness of Philippe, the son of his co-editor. The strange youth had introduced himself as Philippe too, and the coincidence was a striking one. Faure,

too, went to the Lariboisière Hospital in search of news, but he was unlucky. The body had been removed and the family had asked for the strictest secrecy to be observed. Colomer, however, managed to get round this difficulty by appealing to the hospital staff trade union, and within twenty-four hours had got confidential information confirming what he had guessed to be the facts. Thus, by the 25th, the bookseller knew that his customer of the previous day was the suicide in the Lariboisière Hospital mortuary and by the 27th, *Le Libertaire's* staff knew the identity of the dead youth. As should be clear already, he was none other than Philippe Daudet, son of Léon Daudet, editor-in-chief of *L'Action Française* and head of the French Royalist party.

Despite all the precautions taken, despite the veil of silence the family had thrown over the affair, the dead boy was not to repose much longer in the silence of the grave. The anarchists, who were almost alone in their possession of the terrible secret, were to use it with the effect of a bomb.

The feud between the anarchists and the Young Royalists had become fiercer every day after the murder of Marius Plateau. It had begun with insults by words of mouth or in print: it had gone on to challenges, beatings-up and bloody street battles. The violent tone of the controversy had fired the readers on both sides, and the directors of *Le Libertaire*, encouraged by the measure of success they had met with, were thinking of turning their weekly into a daily.

The apostles of the big smash-up could not have hoped for a more sensational scoop to start their daily off than the piece of news they had to themselves. They could be the first to reveal that before he had committed suicide, the son of their most implacable enemy had been converted to anarchism. It was an undreamed of bit of luck. They would print fifty thousand copies of a special edition, and would exploit its dramatic effects so as to goad their enemies into hitting back and so provide themselves with material for a long campaign. The operation was decided on by Vidal,

Faure and Lecoin, on the suggestion of Colomer, and it was calculated to bring them in a handsome profit. And it would have the additional result, as they saw it, of leading to the collapse of the Royalist forces.

Exactly a week had passed since the day of the tragedy, when Vidal wrote and dispatched to Madame Daudet the following letter :

Madam,

I am carrying out today the mission which your son Philippe entrusted me with twenty-four hours before his death. I enclose the letter which he gave me to give you on Friday, 23 November, and I hope you will excuse the delay in forwarding it. Your son came to me for help in carrying out an anarchist outrage. I did everything I could to dissuade him, for even if one admires acts of violence, one has no right to urge anyone else to carry one out. (Incidentally, I am publishing all the details, which I can assure you are absolutely accurate, in an issue of *Le Libertaine* which is coming out today, and which I will send you as soon as it comes off the press.) Since your son did not give me his name, I had to make inquiries in order to establish his identity. Moreover, since I knew *L'Action Française* well enough to be certain it would distort the facts, I have been obliged to use your son's letter in order that the truth should come out. In any case, I feel certain that by acting as I am, I am carrying out the last wishes of Philippe, who was perfectly definite in his statements. Believe me, I find it a very painful thing to bring politics into a private bereavement, but I could not have done otherwise. The few days I spent with Philippe made me fond of him, and I too should have preferred to mourn him in silence. Unfortunately, your friends have forced me to speak. Do not hold it against me, and believe me to be,

Yours faithfully,

Georges Vidal, manager of *Le Libertaine*

The letter enclosed the last message which young Daudet had left with Vidal a week before, to be handed to his mother. This read :

My darling mother,

Forgive me for the sorrow I am bringing you, I have been an anarchist for a long time without daring to tell you. Now the cause has called me, and I believe it is my duty to do what I am doing. All my love to you. Kisses to the children.

Philippe

In accordance with Colomer's suggestions, the two letters were printed the same day in the special number which was to launch the new daily, *Le Libertaire*. A long descriptive article filled in the picture. It recounted how the young man had come to the rue Louis Blanc, how he had been taken in and given a bqd, what he had done and said, the threats he had uttered and the way his identity had been discovered after his suicide.

An army of newsboys distributed the special number all over Paris, and the news it contained came like a thunderbolt. Within a matter of hours it was known in the provinces and abroad, but the painful impression it created had a result quite the contrary of what the anarchist leaders had hoped. All this publicity round the tragic death of a youth was too obviously subjective, too prejudiced, too unhealthy. The anarchists had gone too far : they had offended popular feeling, and the public turned away in disgust. There were even certain comrades who condemned their action outspokenly, as the following comment will show :

' . . . It is with stupefaction that we discover that among the professional anarchists who listened so complacently to this nonsensical talk [Philippe Daudet's threats] there was not one who had the nous to send this child back to his mother and tell him, as a friend would, "The first duty

of an anarchist, my lad, is to know where his duty lies, and the second is to respect his neighbour's liberty and life and, with all the more reason, to respect his own." No one took this common sense line with him. Which proves that while there may be humbugs, sex maniacs, aesthetes, fakers, cranks, journalists and all sorts of other undesirable fauna on *Le Libertaire*, there is not a single anarchist. Only a fool would be capable of believing that a boy of fourteen, whose incoherent talk, wild behaviour and final suicide show only too well that he was mentally unbalanced, could be an anarchist. And a man would have to be a blackguard to pretend to believe it or to want it to be believed. The boy was mad, stark staring mad, that's the truth of it. And that's what the pseudo-anarchists of *Le Libertaire* consider as the sign of anarchism. The ham actors who run the paper and make themselves up as redeemers, physically as well as morally, are extremely anxious to play their part well. They carefully put on the face of a Christ, with long hair as dirty as their minds. They give themselves the airs of inspired prophets to gull the simpletons, and they announce, as solemn as you please, that the Messiah—that is to say anarchy—is coming at their call to save the world. All the same, not one of these saviours, whose daily job is to weep over human distress, thought for a moment of saving a poor kid from death. They found it natural and highly profitable to abandon him to his frenzy for sacrifice, meanwhile counting with satisfaction on the sensation his action would create to push up the sale of their paper and swell the takings they live on.

'Let's have no beating about the bush: when the professional anarchists of *Le Libertaire* published their special numbers on the circumstances which preceded the death of Philippe Daudet, they had only one idea in their heads; to coin money out of the barely buried corpse of the little victim.

'LUX''

In their haste to be out with the news, and for fear someone might get in before them with it, the directors of *Le Libertaire* had not waited to know just what had happened on the afternoon of the 24th. Since they knew nothing of the warning their former comrade Le Flaouter had given to the police, they made no reference to it. This shows as clearly as can be that neither before nor after the suicide had they any link with the bookseller, on whom, in surprising echo of *L'Action Française*'s offensive, they were soon to open a violent attack.

Although they had got off first in the race for circulation, they failed in launching their daily. The same commentator, 'LUX', does not mince his words when he pointedly puts the two antagonists on the same footing :

'As for the hyenas of *L'Action Française*,' he writes, 'not wishing to be outdone by their ravenous rivals of *Le Libertaire*, they followed their example and flung themselves furiously on the gruesome quarry, fighting for every shred of the young victim, who was thus able to provide food for two carnivorous packs, that of *L'Action Française* and that of *Le Libertaire*.

'These two rival sheets, one as pernicious as the other, practise the same methods of lying, exaggeration, bluff, intimidation and violence. The neurotics who read one and the crack-brains who read the other come of the same intellectual stock. Almost all of them are fanatics, simpletons, innocents and mental minors, whom their wily guardians lead by the nose.

'By the accident of his position, young Daudet read both these two poisonous sheets and absorbed their poison. It was a big dose of lunacy for a child's brain. Between these two abysses of stupidity and immorality, one as bottomless as the other, his young mind foundered, first in madness, then in death. It was bound to happen.'

It was indeed bound to happen. And from the very outset of this ghoulisn competition, it was equally obvious that the

journalists of *Le Libéraire* were not going to be a match for their adversaries.

The blow was, of course, a bitter one for *L'Action Française*. It threatened to reflect on the theory of hundred per cent nationalism by bringing the person of its leader into discredit, to disturb morale in the ranks of the Young Royalists, to break up the readership of the paper and above all to ruin it commercially. The respect due to the memory of the dead boy was not going to weigh very heavily in face of these considerations. The first thing to do was to turn the tables on the enemy. A violent counter-attack must be launched without delay.

On Monday, 3 December, forty-eight hours after *Le Libéraire's* revelations, Léon Daudet explained in a long article in *L'Action Française* that he had believed in his son's suicide at the beginning. Obsessed as he was by his grief, he had been concerned only to understand, from a psychiatric point of view, the incidents and the symptoms which had led the youth to take his life. But the details published two days before by *Le Libéraire*, and the behaviour of Georges Vidal had come to him like a flash of lightning. He was now convinced that Philippe had been murdered.

The same day he communicated officially with the Public Prosecutor and later laid an information against a person or persons unknown. From that moment on, everything that he said or wrote on the case, all his accusations, all his conversations about it, every piece of procedure, in fact every bit of evidence about the story, together with the comments it called for, appeared on the front page of *L'Action Française* and provided it with an avalanche of copy.

The first witnesses heard by the examining magistrate who took charge of the case were the directors of *Le Libéraire* and those concerned with it. Officials of the Sûreté Générale and the Préfecture of Police also submitted reports. One of the earliest to give evidence was the bookseller Le Flaouter. He recounted what he knew of the two visits Philippe had made

to his shop and added that at the last moment he had given him a sum of about ninety francs so that he could take the train home. This statement, fitting in as it did with the findings on the spot and the sum discovered on the dying youth, only confirmed what was already believed about the end of the story.

But as it conflicted with the theory of Léon Daudet, who maintained that, on the contrary, his son had been robbed, its only result was to draw down on the bookseller the accusations which had first been hurled at the anarchists of the rue Louis Blanc. Then, deduction leading to deduction, the police officers who had kept watch over the bookshop were found to be guilty. Finally there was hardly a witness in the whole case who did not come under the accuser's fire.

Though his accusations varied a good deal, he fixed in the end on seven culprits, whom he named in the information he laid on 12 January 1925, and who were all immediately arraigned, in accordance with the French procedure in criminal charges brought by a private prosecutor. The list started with Messrs Marlier and Lannes, Commissioner and Chief Inspector at the Sûreté Générale respectively, who were accused of plotting and organizing the crime. Next Police Superintendent Colombo was accused of committing the murder and Chief Inspector Delange, of the criminal police, of shielding and assisting him. The bookseller Le Flaouter was accused of complicity with all the Sûreté officers, and Bajot, the taxi-driver, was also accused of complicity, in that he wittingly conveyed the body of the wounded youth and lent himself to the faking of a suicide. Finally the anarchist Gruffy, alone of *Le Libertaire's* staff, was accused of theft and fraudulent conversion, in that he had kept the travelling bag and other things which Philippe Daudet had handed over to him.

The examining magistrate's first task was to have the corpse exhumed and to order a post-mortem. The results of this were unequivocal. The post-mortem, carried out by the highest



French medico-legal experts, completely confirmed the previous findings and proved beyond a shadow of doubt that the case was a suicide. But this did not halt the prosecutor in his course. He contested the result at once, and in support of his successive objections cited those of his numerous friends, none of whom, naturally, knew anything about the exact circumstances of the case.

It would be a hard task today, without falling into the same incoherence, to follow Léon Daudet through the interminable labyrinth of suppositions, presumptions, probabilities and deductions, by turns absurd, self-contradictory and completely disingenuous to which he committed himself in public or in the chambers of the examining magistrate. The host of theories which he voluntarily abandoned, being unable to follow them up, have no interest in themselves. All they did was to create an atmosphere of confusion round the affair which baffled criticism. It is easier, however, after the event to grasp as a whole the imaginative promptings which he seized on and elaborated.

The prosecutor represented himself as being the centre of the whole affair. He was a journalist, he was a politician and he bore a name celebrated in literature and in politics. But also—and this was the main point—he was leader of the Royalist party, and as such the declared enemy of the Republican régime. The opposition he represented was, he said, a dangerous one, since it intended one day to seize power by force. As a result, the Government had conceived an implacable hostility for him. It had, following a well-known tradition, told its police to put him out of the way, and the police had their own account to settle with him too. He had been responsible during the First World War for bringing its head, Malvy, the Minister of the Interior, to trial for treason, and that had not been avenged yet. The police had already tried once to dispatch him, by means of the woman anarchist, Germaine Berton, but since he was on his guard, Marius Plateau had been killed in his place. Since they no longer

dared attack him frontally, they had sought to get at him indirectly in the person of his son.

In his eyes, Marius Plateau and Philippe Daudet were mere secondary victims. It was only because of its impotence that a police force at the orders of a Government of murderers had struck them down. The real target had been himself, Léon Daudet, Enemy No. 1 of the Third Republic. The dead pair were only a background to this real drama.

This was the theory on which Léon Daudet, who played the part at once of prosecutor and investigator, built the cloud-castle of his accusations. The plot, he wrote, had been organized by Lannes, who was a brother-in-law of Poincaré, then Prime Minister, and Marlier, who was a protégé of the President of the Republic, Millerand. The two confederates had not been able to agree, however, on how to deal with Philippe. Poincaré had wanted no more than to compromise the boy by arranging for him to be arrested in a police round-up. Millerand insisted on having him killed as a dangerous anarchist during a fight, by police officers acting in self-defence. This led to a difference, and to the 'police imbroglio from which the murderers were never able to extricate themselves'.

One proof that the crime had been a premeditated affair was provided, according to Daudet, by a trip Lannes made to Gourdon-sur-Lot a few weeks before the affair, on the pretext of a service inquiry about an officer. The real reason for the trip was that Lannes wanted to have a quiet look at the files in the local sub-préfecture on the assault on Malvy by Young Royalists in the course of a war veterans' demonstration. It was from this file that Lannes got the description of Philippe Daudet, which he was thus able to pass on to Le Flaouter when the moment came. Unless indeed, Léon Daudet suggests again, the description was compiled six months before, during the Joan of Arc celebrations in Paris, when Philippe was in the march-past beside Charles Maurras.

A proof that the crime had been premeditated on Marlier's

part was provided by a report by Superintendent Combs, of the Angers flying squad. The report drew the attention of Chief Inspector Delange to an article in a local paper, *Le Crible*, in June 1923, which represented the youth as having anarchist sympathies. Philippe was stated to have been severely punished and even knocked about by his father during a holiday at an Atlantic coast resort. The report had been passed on by Delange to Marlier, who had shut it up in his safe, from which it had only emerged at the demand of Léon Daudet, who had heard of it. Delange, who was a tool of Briand, had been no more than an instrument in the whole affair.

Madame Léon Daudet, for her part, testified that at the beginning of the same year, 1923, Philippe had been hailed by his name and violently abused by a building worker as he was passing by a scaffolding. The workman could only be an informer of the Sûreté Générale, which proved that the boy was already under observation then.

All this, according to Léon Daudet, proved conclusively that the crime had been plotted on a high level by Millerand, Poincaré and Briand, with the assistance of Marlier, Lannes and Delange, or alternatively by the three high officials with the approval of their powerful protectors.

To come to the details of the proof: *L'Action Française* never attempted to contest the existence of the nervous trouble the boy was suffering from, nor the incidents that had been the consequence. Léon Daudet had been worrying about it, and he knew that his anxiety had leaked out. He knew that his enemies were waiting to attack him at this weak point.

The weak point was 'captured by the enemy', that is to say the Sûreté Générale, when Philippe returned from Havre on Thursday, 22 October, on the third day of his escapade, and arrived at the Gare St Lazare about 1 p.m. On the platform, a police officer, or an anarchist informer, was waiting for him.

Who was this policeman or informer? May it not have been he who had first suggested the trip to Havre? Daudet raised

the question only to answer it with a completely baseless assertion: 'None of the actors in the story has admitted it, nevertheless it can be looked on as a certainty that he was there. It was there that our poor boy was caught in the net prepared for him by the Sûreté Générale. That was the moment when the bandits of the rue des Saussaies put the final touches to their criminal plan and executed it.'

When he wrote these lines, Léon Daudet had doubtless already forgotten those he had published on 4 January 1924 and repeated again and again. According to this first explanation, his son had gone to the anarchists with his eyes open: 'I may recall here that for a long time past the unhappy boy had conceived the idea of infiltrating into the anarchists' ranks, ferreting out the secret of their criminal plots against us by offering to take part in them, and then upsetting all their plans by a master-stroke.'

Gruffy, who put Philippe up for a night and then hung on to his suitcase, was only an unimportant super. By agreement with the heads of *Le Libertaire*, he had arranged for Le Flaouter to take the boy over and had been used by the Sûreté, after the event, to confuse the clues.

'Philippe, as we have seen, was in the hands of the anarchists. They were not, however, reliable enough, as the Sûreté saw it, to carry out its criminal plan to the end. Our child had therefore to be passed from their hands into those of a professional policeman. It was Vidal who, in agreement with Henri Faure, and probably on the advice of the Sûreté, sent Philippe on to Le Flaouter, where he was to die.

'There are good grounds for believing that our poor child in fact arrived at the boulevard Beaumarchais bookshop on the Friday night and that he was shut up there.'

Le Flaouter may have said that the first time he saw Philippe enter his shop was on the morning of Saturday, 24 November. He was only lying, however, as was Vidal, when he said that Philippe had written his final message of farewell at the office of *Le Libertaire*.

'This letter, which was certainly written under pressure, is much more likely to have been dictated to my son on 23 or 24 November by the sinister Le Flaouter, in whose basement he was held prisoner till the moment came for him to be killed.'

It was obvious, Daudet went on, that the letter Philippe had written and torn up two days before at Havre, and which the Hotel Bellevue porter had pieced together, had been rushed to Paris and used by the Sûreté Générale to serve as a model for Le Flaouter.

There could be no denying Le Flaouter's call on Lannes on Saturday afternoon, nor Lannes' subsequent giving of the alarm to Marlier, since these had been followed by the dispatch of the warning message, a copy of which Léon Daudet had received at 3 p.m. 'But all that was mere play-acting, since Philippe had in fact been detained since the day before.' Indeed, Daudet looked on the warning message as one more proof of premeditation and of incitement to murder, 'for everyone knows that the phrase "is armed" in a Sûreté Générale description is an order to kill.'

There was one more suspicious detail. When Lannes left Marlier on the Saturday about 3 p.m., he came back to the boulevard Beaumarchais to see for himself that the surveillance squad had taken up its duties, and he said that he had gone up by bus. That was a lie, Daudet claimed. He had come by taxi and had left the vehicle to wait for Delange and his men in case they should need it. But the unknown chauffeur got tired of waiting, and disappeared into the mists—like M. Léon Daudet's own assertion.

Finally, Chief Inspector Delange some time after four o'clock sent two of his men to have a look at the bookshop. They discovered the young anarchist in the basement, he made a vague gesture of self-defence, and one of the two shot him in the head.

The fat was in the fire, and something had to be done about it. The two officers loaded Philippe into Bajot's taxi,

which happened to be on the boulevard Beaumarchais. The boy was dying, or already dead, so the two men supported him under the arms, as one would do an invalid, and one of them got in beside him. The Saint Antoine Hospital was only round the corner, but it would be better to get away from the scene of the crime. So the boy's escort told the driver to go to the Lariboisière Hospital and dropped off a few blocks away, leaving him to organize the final bit of play-acting.

The theory of the accidental murder was one of the last if not the last of Daudet's theories, and it was also the least shocking; the accuser had realized that the story of the political plot was a bit too tall.

But in addition to the mysterious informer of the Gare St Lazare and the mysterious taxi-driver attributed to Chief Inspector Lannes, it required two more actors, and these must be identified. They were the man who had committed the murder and his assistant, the latter apparently being the police officer who had taken the dying youth to the boulevard Magenta. With the aid of his private inquiry services, Daudet was easily able to put his finger on both. The murderer was none other than Superintendent Colombo, Delange's lieutenant at the Criminal Investigation department, and his assistant was Inspector Gagneux, of the same department.

It is true that these accusations were in flat contradiction, minute by minute, with the best established evidence, but nevertheless they were the foundation of the prosecutor's entire case. It may be asked what they were based on. Nothing could be simpler: they were based on a vision. Léon Daudet believed in miracles: at least he said he did. For him, a miracle was a fact which reason alone could not explain. And he had been a witness of the following miraculous fact: a stigmatized nun, whom he had met after Philippe's disappearance, had seen the boy's murder in a dream.

'She proved it to my wife and myself by giving us the name of the policeman who had done the murder, the figure to-

wards whom our investigations had been pointing, and whom we didn't know from Adam. From time to time she talked to the child through an inner conversation, and his replies, which she repeated to us, helped us in the most extraordinary way in the preparation of the case.'

The name given by the nun was that of Colombo, whose own story, from the outset of the inquiry, had been that he had gone to Le Flaouter's shop some time after five o'clock, found there was not a single customer there, and left at once.

As to the officer who had acted as assistant to the murderer and then taken charge of the body, Léon Daudet identified him no less easily. He first checked on the private addresses of all the police officers who had taken part in the surveillance of the boulevard Beaumarchais. He discovered by this means that one of them, Inspector Gagneux, lived at 118 boulevard Magenta. The deduction was obvious. It was Gagneux who had taken Bajot's taxi, and he had stopped it in the boulevard Magenta, near his home, 'so as to have a quick wash and brush up before going back to the surveillance squad to lay a false scent'.

It was a deduction worthy of a Simenon novel, but it could hardly be expected that it would be treated seriously by an examining magistrate. Nevertheless Bajot protested, and was able to prove his good faith by irrefutable evidence. Daudet condescended to admit it; but in that case, he said, Bajot had been the victim of a clever bit of faking. What was more, he had made a mistake about the nature of the unusual noise he had heard in the boulevard Magenta. It could only have been some ordinary sort of street noise, and it was a mere coincidence that it had led the other witnesses to give misleading evidence. Finally, this evidence had been interfered with by Superintendent Benezech, of the St Vincent de Paul police station.

Despite this concession to his honesty, Bajot felt he had been libelled and wrote to the examining magistrate:

Sir;

Following the death of his son, M. Léon Daudet has laid an information for murder and is simultaneously suing for civil damages in the case which you are investigating. It is now nearly three months since this investigation started, and the theory of murder has not yet been officially rejected. Although my own personal convictions revolt against this theory, I have also a strong interest in the discovery of the truth, and I should like to contribute towards this. My interest is obvious. If there was a murder, the murderer has done me a serious injury by using me as a tool to conceal his criminal plot. The fact of the injury is now incontestable, for those who support the theory of a murder all make conjectures which are most damaging to my reputation. The press has also lent itself to these conjectures. I have therefore decided to take part in the search for the truth, and I intend to seek damages for the injury I have suffered.

I repeat that personally I am still convinced that the affair was a suicide, but I cannot hold aloof from an inquiry whose results interest me in the highest degree. For these reasons, I am instituting a civil action over the case. My means are extremely limited, but my anxiety to see the truth come to light is such that I am willing to make any sacrifice that I can.

I therefore have the honour to institute a civil action, and I am ready to make the usual deposit.

Bajot

Until the taxi-driver had taken this step, Léon Daudet had the running of the investigations to himself. He did his best to contest the admissibility of Bajot's complaint, which would give the accused man and the lawyers of the other parties the same rights as himself. The court, however, overruled his objection, and thenceforward the judicial inquiry proceeded with each side able to argue its case.



Having set out to prove the truth of a fairy story, Léon Daudet could only continue to build cloud-castles, at the same time pushing the sales of his works through the incidental publicity.

He was not perhaps following a deliberately thought-out technique; he was employing a method in which his economic and political counter-espionage campaigns had made him an adept. The first move in it was to present as a serious piece of information an assertion which was based on nothing but imagination and which was in any case impossible to check.

'There is every reason to believe that . . . There can be little doubt that . . . It seems certain that . . . It is nevertheless possible that . . . Probably . . . Doubtless . . . Certain sources state . . . It seems much more probable that . . . Reliable information permits me to assert that . . .' Thus introduced in a first sentence, the conjecture had become a certainty in the second and was an established truth by the third; after which it was reproduced in other French or foreign papers.

It was then picked up and quoted by its original author, who presented it as equivalent to a proof. Reiterated *ad nauseam*, it was eventually used as a foundation for further affirmations equally fantastic. And though events may have given it the lie, it was never corrected.

Léon Daudet, who posed as an infallible expert in every science, thus asserted that if Philippe had killed himself in Bajot's taxi, the butt of the revolver found beside him, which he would have gripped feverishly in his last moments, would have borne his fingerprints. Consequently, since there were no fingerprints on the butt it was obvious that the weapon had been interfered with or changed.

It happened, however, that the butt was of a hard, grooved wood, and therefore would not have taken any fingerprints, even if they had been applied deliberately. For that matter, the veriest tyro in the criminal police knows that the more

nervous the pressure of the palm and fingers, the more the prints are smudged on a smooth surface; all the more reason why they should be unrecognizable on a rough surface. Nevertheless, the upside-down proof, repeated again and again as it was, had its effect on the less-informed readers, that is to say the majority.

If, on the other hand, the fact proved by the evidence, important though it might be, was an awkward one, it was forgotten, was deliberately overlooked, ignored. Thus it will be noted that Léon Daudet, quick though he was to draw a conclusion, never explained his reasons for not reporting the disappearance of his son, nor his reactions when he found a surveillance squad posted outside his front door, and when he received from Marlier, only a little while before the suicide, the telegram warning him about a young anarchist with large feet and a fawn overcoat.

The very next day Madame Daudet had only to read a three-line news item, without a word of description, to guess something was wrong. It seems almost incredible that Philippe's disappearance five days before, wearing the famous fawn overcoat, did not leap to M. Daudet's mind the moment he read the extraordinary warning from the Sûreté.

If the idea never suggested itself to him, despite his anxiety; if, for all the gaps in a description which must have been familiar to him, it never occurred to the missing boy's father to put two and two together, can it be wondered at that the police officers of the Delange surveillance squad failed to identify in the street a youth they had never seen in their lives?

At the moment when Léon Daudet received the warning telegram, it only needed prompt action on his part at the boulevard Beaumarchais, where one of his household could have gone, or the Ministry of the Interior, or the Préfecture of Police to avert, or at any rate to postpone the tragedy. It would therefore seem, either that he had not got enough presence of mind, which is almost inconceivable, or that he

deliberately refused to take what he considered a humiliating step, though it was essential if his son was to be found.

Nevertheless, the examining magistrate employed every means of investigation to the limit. Every guarantee humanly possible was given to the prosecutor, even when his demands were most outrageous. No fact worth considering was left in the dark: no check, no expert opinion or second opinion, no police search was refused, and no susceptibilities spared when it came to calling witnesses. No humiliation was spared either to the officers concerned in the case, who were also the daily target for the most scurrilous insults by the editor-in-chief of *L'Action Française*, who was at pains to send free copies of his paper to their homes and to those of their neighbours.

'These gentlemen of the rue des Saussaies,' he wrote in one of his more moderate passages, 'reason something like the parings of a corn on the toe or the inferior shavings of a mouldy sausage'. The witticism may be amusing, but it is hardly decent when the tragic death of a child is concerned, and it proves nothing. But this miserable type of highly-spiced journalism suited readers out for the sensational. They would buy the paper out of curiosity once they no longer received it for nothing. And their curiosity would not be disappointed when they read in its columns that the heads of the Commissioner of the Sûreté and his assistants would soon roll in the dust, while Léon Daudet stood at the feet of the guillotine, gloating as its blade fell.

Everything has an end, however. One fine day the prosecutor found he had run through his stock of intrigues and plausible suppositions. He then used his position as a member of Parliament for a fresh diversion, by shifting his attack to the political plane. In a motion which he tabled in the Chamber of Deputies, he accused the Government of collectively shielding the Sûreté officials in their guilt.

Replying to the motion, M. Maunoury, Minister of the Interior, said:

'M. Daudet's accusations are directed both against the

Minister of the Interior and certain of his assistants. When he addressed the House on his complaints against me, M. Daudet claimed that his revelations would bring dishonour on my name. M. Daudet is under a curious illusion. It is beyond his power to bring dishonour on the name of an honourable man. The Chamber will understand that I feel myself above such attacks; I brush them from my path with contempt. Moreover, I am not prepared to accept any lessons from M. Daudet whether they be in honesty, in uprightness or in patriotism.

'As to the motion, I am sure the House will not allow itself to be imposed on by a trick. What M. Daudet is doing is using his parliamentary immunity to make accusations which he repeats every day in his paper but in which he cannot believe, since his prosecution is directed against persons unknown.

'We all respect the sorrow of parents who have the death of a son to lament. But we do not want to be made the victims of a manoeuvre whose aim is to turn an affair which is a matter for the courts into a theme of public discussion. I am sure the Chamber will respect the prerogatives of judiciary and will not want to interfere with a case which is *sub judice* or to trespass on the work of the courts. The Government assumes responsibility for the case and makes the rejection of the motion a question of confidence.

'It is a political manoeuvre we are up against, for yesterday M. Daudet was telling a public meeting: "I mean to plunge my sword up to the hilt in the heart of the wretched political police".'

M. DAUDET: I shall do it, too.

M. MAUNOURY: Our duty is to safeguard the republican institutions, which M. Daudet is seeking to undermine. Respect for the independence of the judiciary is at the root of these institutions. For this reason, since I cannot accept the discussion of the motion, I demand its rejection and I ask for a vote of confidence.

And the motion was rejected by 342 votes to 51.

In July 1925 the judicial inquiry finally came to an end, and the appeal court issued its judgment :

We, Chief Justice of the Paris Appeal Court ;

Considering the prosecution brought on the complaint of M. Léon Daudet against M. Colombo, a superintendent of police, Chief Inspectors Delange and Lannes, Marlier, Prefect of Corsica, formerly Commissioner at the Sûreté Générale, Le Flaouter, bookseller, Gruffy and others, on charges of premeditated homicide and of aiding and abetting, and also, in the case of Gruffy, of theft and fraudulent conversion ;

Considering the indictment presented by the Public Prosecutor on 27 July 1925 ; whereas the charge of premeditated homicide is completely unjustified, since the death of Philippe Daudet is the result of suicide ; and whereas the other charges are not proved ;

Considering articles 484 and 128 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, dismiss the charges against the afore-named, and give costs against the prosecutor.

Executed in our chambers at the Law Courts, on 20 July 1925.

André, Chief Justice

The judgment did not admit of an appeal.

In his final address, the Public Prosecutor turned down all the prosecutor's allegations and stated : 'These are the unavoidable conclusions at the end of a prolonged inquiry which magistrates, respectful of the sorrow of a father and a mother, have carried out with patience and attention to detail. It is by now certain that the plaintiff is deluding himself, that no crime was committed and that the unfortunate child, whose tragic end so stirred the feelings of the public, knowingly took his own life.'

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## Hundred Per Cent Nationalism

'PRIME MINISTER POINCARÉ is a blackguard, his Minister Albert Sarraut is a blackguard, and Barthou is a blackguard too. Poincaré the blackguard, Barthou the cur, Albert the blackguard . . . That scoundrel of a judge Audivière has kicked the bucket; another stiff is Attorney-General Mancel, and one more stiff is Gustave Téry, editor-in-chief of *L'Œuvre*. The grandfather and the great-uncle of this senator were highwaymen who died in penal servitude; he married the great-grand-daughter of La Bancal, of the Fualdès case, who brewed blood in a cauldron, and his father was sentenced to fifteen days' imprisonment for stealing a rabbit. Judge Legras and his like crawl their way to promotion, with their bellies on the ground and a smear of horse dung on their foreheads and their judges' toques. . . . The Appeal Court is the dunghill of toadies; the poor fools of judges, lickers and suckers of political feet, are taken by public opinion for what they are, grovelling scoundrels. . . . The general public will be edified at the degree of servility into which a great part of the French judiciary has fallen, and which is one of the shames of this accursed régime. . . . These corrupt and criminal judges, Scherdlin, Barnaud, Peignot, Sevestre . . . I have got an account to settle with Albert Sarraut, otherwise Blackguard, the Prime Minister, assisted by the notorious swindler who is Minister of Justice. . . . With the connivance of various narks and journalistic bandits, such as Téry, who is a corpse today. . . . On the indictment of Attorney-General Mancel, who has kicked the bucket since, a scoundrel, Judge Flory . . . The Poincaré-

Benucci tribe, whose policeman-member is the bandit Lannes . . . Publish the unrepeatable story of the three marriages of Mme Poincaré, one of which was celebrated in church while her first husband, a convicted criminal on the run, was still alive. . . . Louis Barthou, a self-confessed sex-maniac . . . Albert Sarraut, that indescribable scoundrel, a failure, a debauchee of the lowest sort . . . From the half-hatched egg of Caillaux, wriggling like a tripanosome, to the mug of a hyena with the dysentery that serves as a face for Malvy. . . . That vermin of a little Reynaud, known as "Maxico" . . . That little cad of a Laval . . . Finally I come to Henry Simond's moke, M. de Kérillis, the coppers' pal; his ludicrous brayings mingle with the patched-up fol-de-rols of the pianola of democrashit. . . . They must have used some pretty powerful arguments at the morals squad of the police to get as accomplished a cad as Henry Simond to give his Kérillis *carte blanche* for the four or five excremental articles that the blackguard evacuated last week. . . . Léon Blum, the tearful, pansy, the drawing-room hermaphrodite, reverently collects in a cup the pus from the altar of Baal. . . . Millerand the syphilitic? The dunghheap Macbeth . . . Was Briand a traitor as a policeman? Was he a traitor for money? . . . The decomposing judiciary: Judge Flory, the old prostitute, and his two scoundrels of assessors, Pittié and Marty—and Diousidon, who hasn't yet reached that degree of putrefaction, who is just a comic flunkey, taking his pleasures where he can find them, in the police and political dustbin. . . . Louis Barthou, that bit of brothel refuse, that abject and degraded creature whose conscience is nothing but a gutter, has collected under his honours a layer of purulent perversions and vices which put him at the beck and call of every murderer, thief and blackmailer; he is a character who might be the joint product of Petronius and the Marquis de Sade, a drinker of pus and an eater of filth. . . . Of Chief Justice André, promoted to be head of the judiciary, I would only say that he is ending in shame a life led in

servility. . . . These abominable judges, without honour and without shame, have shown the way to the vilest degradation of modern history. Their red robes and their ermine, their gold and silver-braided toques, are befouled with mud and blood. . . . General Targe won his badges of rank by the most shameful prevarications. . . . General Sarraill deserves nothing but hatred and loathing because he betrayed his brothers-in-arms and his country. . . . General Nollet (one of the heroes of the First World War, a minister, an army commander, for ten years supervisor of the disarmament of Germany and Grand Chancellor of the Legion of Honour) is a traitor like André, a sinister flunkey, a toady, a coward of monstrous cowardice, a boot-licker, he scrapes up Caillaux's turds with a gilded shovel and puts them in the shop window; he is disarming France for the benefit of Germany. . . . !'

For the coiner of these descriptions, the succession of France's Prime Ministers and most of her Ministers were 'blackguards, filth, guttersnipes, traitors who ought to have a stick of dynamite stuck up their backsides, criminals whose dirty carcasses will be ripped up, nauseous creatures, spawn of the brothel, cowards, cads, stinkers, sons of Prussians, sons of murderers, sons of thieves, Peeping Toms, key-hole sniffers . . . '

As the anthologist who gleaned this literary bouquet remarks: 'It went on like that for columns at a time, almost every day, for a quarter of a century, with the obvious complicity of the police, who never turned a hair under the flood of filth, and of the successive governments, who were deluged with insults.'

This extraordinary collection of obscenities is by no means a complete one. It is a very small sample and has been taken from a weekly paper whose editor extracted the passages from their source, the files of *L'Action Française*. If they are quoted here, it is certainly not for the mere pleasure of sampling their savour. It is rather to draw the reader's attention to the characteristics of a system of propaganda in the



Hitlerian style, which sets out to seize hold of and din itself into the mind by the excesses of its language till it ends up as an obsession.

In one of the many articles in which he boasted of his journalistic successes, Léon Daudet compared his method of pitiless repetition to the tactics of 'heavy artillery which pounds the enemy's positions till they are untenable'. In the absence of logical arguments, abuse obviously had to serve as ammunition, and it was this that made the most impression.

'We pretended to believe Léon Daudet,' François Mauriac writes, 'when he depicted that incomparable performer Aristide Briand as an illiterate blackguard with a cigarette-stub dangling from the corner of his mouth. That was all part of the game.'

A curious game, whose rules were doubtless drawn up for a chosen few. Even when it cannot be certain that among these few, the men who were cast as scapegoats found it wildly amusing. For the ordinary man, for that majority of readers who find such peaks of French intellectual high spirits beyond them, a word is a word, an insult is an insult and a challenge which is left unanswered is still a challenge. When it was printed in 100,000 copies every day, 365 days a year, this bombardment, with its questionable humour, was not quite as harmless as M. Mauriac seemed to believe. On the contrary, it can be maintained that the scatological artillery of M. Léon Daudet, which was the principal support of *L'Action Française's* offensives, was one of the most dangerous arms in the Royalist arsenal.

As to the historical doctrine of '100 per cent nationalism', a formula originally launched by Charles Maurras, it too had been expounded year in year out between 1920 and 1940 in the party daily, and it was also condensed by Léon Daudet in a bludgeon of a book, which he dedicated to the victims of the 1934 Stavisky riots, under the alluring title of *The Political Police*.

Under the yet more alluring title of *How the Political Police Carries out its Murders*, the author announced a little later that thirty editions of the book had been exhausted in five weeks and that the circulation of the paper had risen simultaneously to 500,000, a success without precedent either in France or abroad.

Now that we are familiar with the vocabulary Daudet used, let us examine his arguments. In 1894, he wrote, the leader of treason in France was Dreyfus. From 1897 to 1904 treason was personified by Waldeck-Rousseau, the Prime Minister whose Government pardoned Dreyfus, and General Gallifet, its War Minister. From 1914 to 1818 the traitors were Caillaux and Malvy, Ministers respectively of Finance and the Interior, and both acquitted by the High Court of the treason of which Daudet accused them.

From 1919 to 1924, Léon Daudet was in Parliament, and therefore treason had to take cover. It reappeared in 1926, after Léon Daudet's electoral defeat and the Left-wing victory. In 1926, at the instigation of two 'criminals', Cardinals Gasparri and Seretti, Pope Pius XI formed an alliance with Briand, then Foreign Minister, against *L'Action Française*, on the pretext of its immoral propaganda. Though the paper was put on the Index, it did not suffer, since it already had a circulation of several hundred thousand.

In 1930, said Daudet, despite Maurras' warnings, Tardieu evacuated Mainz. In 1932, under a Minister of the Interior named Mahieu, 'a pretty questionable half-wit', the elections resulted in a new Left-wing advance, and the policy of treason personified by Briand continued. In 1933 the storm gathered round the Stavisky affair, and in 1934 the *Action Française* League mustered its troops in the Place de la Concorde. This was for the rioting on 6 February, which was put down in blood. The sales of the paper went up five-fold, but Daudet agreed that for lack of a better-laid plan the *Action Française* League had missed by inches the chance of putting the Pretender back on the French throne.

After the riots on 6 February and the 'execution' of Judge Prince, Léon Daudet published a catechism of political assassination as it was practised by the Masonic lodges, either on their own initiative or under the orders of 'these bloody-handed gentry of the rue des Saussaies'. He set out a tabulated list of their methods:

(1) Execution by a police informer: the cases of Almeyda, Plateau, Petliura, Bonservizi, etc.

(2) Execution by a police officer in the course of his duties: the cases of Gohary, Stavisky, Steinheil.

(3) Execution by an habitual criminal: the cases of Syveton and Prince.

(4) Execution by suggestion, pressure, intimidation, blackmail, extremely frequent. Usually returned under the convenient heading of suicide.

(5) Execution by intermediary, half-mad or terrorized: the case of Doumer, Gorguloff.

(6) Execution by means of a pre-arranged police mistake: the case of Philippe Daudet.

(7) Execution by means of a trap: the cases of Koutieff, Prince.

(8) Execution by poisoning: the case of Mangin.

True to its usual form, the Sûreté roped even the brothels into its vendetta against Léon Daudet, but its trouble was all for nothing.

'When I began to have some influence as a deputy for Paris in the Chamber elected in 1919,' he wrote, 'the Sûreté Générale had my photograph sent to the madames of all the brothels in the capital, with the request that they should report the fact if I were to visit their establishments. I learned of this fact through one or two of them writing to me to express their astonishment at the move.' Which would seem to show that the Royalist party could count, when occasion needed, on sympathizers in the most exclusive social circles.

According to M. Daudet, the carrying out of a police crime calls for :

(1) Organizing directors, liaison agents, executants and executants of executants, in order to confuse the evidence.

(2) Once the crime has been committed, there have got to be alibis, suicide-hunters, false witnesses, pliable experts, blackmailers and subservient newspapers.

(3) Finally, if the case comes before the assize court, the jury has got to be hand-picked and packed.

There is not a word in the whole book about the nationalist assassination of the Socialist leader Jaurès, on the eve of the 1914 war. Doubtless the author thought that this was not a political crime and could not find for it any classification that he could safely talk of.

Léon Daudet continued to develop his theories, in an impenetrable cloud of numbered formulae, in two further chapters, and ended with the following pellucid conclusions :

'The Sûreté Générale carries out three types of crime ; crimes of treason, crimes of personal vengeance, and the hushing up of scandals, Masonic or otherwise. It is high time to put an end to the Sûreté Générale, whose so-called reform is a bad joke, enough to make a fly laugh.'

But far and away the wildest piece of imagination is to be found in the *Panorama of the Third Republic*, a new edition of *The Political Police*, where Léon Daudet solemnly traces a connection between the death of his son in 1923 and a disaster which occurred in Hamburg in 1929.

'Only later was it known,' he wrote, 'that the General Staff in Berlin, in its fury [at the French occupation of the Ruhr] had considered bombarding Paris with phosgene gas, and fixed the date for 23 January, 1923. It was only at the last moment that this insensate attack, which would have provoked a terrible reply, was called off. The tons of phosgene which were never used blew up at Hamburg in 1929, causing heavy casualties. That was how the mystery was revealed.'

'This date, 23 January, explains the murder of our colleague, the war hero Marius Plateau, who was killed on 22 January by Germaine Berton, at the instigation of a paid informer of the Sûreté Générale, Le Flaouter. And on 24 November 1923, on the instigation of Iannes, the brother-in-law of Poincaré, whose sister he married, my son Philippe Daudet, aged fourteen and a half, after he had run away from home, was enticed to the house of the same Le Flaouter and shot in the head.'

One is at a loss to understand what relation of cause and effect there can be between the explosion of the phosgene at Hamburg and the death of young Daudet in Paris six years earlier. Obviously we are dealing not with a satirical thrust but with a piece of incoherent nonsense designed to keep up a spirit of vengeance among the boobies who are unfortunate enough to take that sort of argument seriously.

Writing in 1946, at a time when the tragic consequences of this shameful propaganda had become clear, M. Mauriac spoke of its influence in a rather different tone.

Of *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, he says, 'this famous title might have served as a motto for the type of men whose criminal writing we overlooked because they made us laugh. I am speaking of the years before the Occupation, when the enemy was not yet there to supervise the attacks made by Frenchmen on other Frenchmen. They made us laugh, but they made us shiver as well for surely there was an element of cowardice in the licence he public allowed to a man like Léon Daudet to flourish his cudgel every day over the backs of people whose faces he didn't like.'

M. Mauriac obviously thinks a lot of the sense of humour displayed in the 'criminal writing' which he rightly attributes to the editors of *L'Action Française*. But he nevertheless admits that this charming literature frightened him as well as amused him, and he feels that to tolerate it implied a certain cowardice.

It could not have been better put. It was obvious that the

criminal writing was bound sooner or later to lead to criminal action. There was of course a half-way house between laughing at the hateful propaganda and trembling before it: acting against it. There was nothing in the world to stop the police and the authorities from taking legal action.

But the roles in those days were reversed, as in a film that is run backwards. Ministers, judges and police were hunted by the aggressors while the public looked on in high good humour. The disconcerting performance went on till the day when neither the gutter vocabulary nor the comic strip story of the crimes of the political police were capable of drawing a laugh from anyone, except on the other side of the frontier.

*L'Action Française*, which had been founded in August 1899 by Vaugois and Maurras as a monthly review and later became a fortnightly, was turned into a daily paper in 1908, thanks to the large amount of capital put into it by Léon Daudet. Daudet assumed the title, and drew the pay, of editor-in-chief and from then on his political and literary activities were indistinguishable from those of his paper.

Daudet and Maurras persisted in trying Alfred Dreyfus all over again, and they persistently denounced the predominance of Jewish, Protestant, Masonic and alien influences and called for the return of the King. 'We stand for everything that is national,' they declared, and sheltering behind this unanswerable motto they fiercely proclaimed their monopoly of French patriotism. But the front line was for others: they took care to stray as little as possible from their well-upholstered directors' offices. Outside, the most notable activities of the *Action Française* League were the agitation and strong-arm methods of the Young Royalists. Maurras told his troops that a resounding slap in the face, publicly administered to a Republican Minister, did more for the Royalist cause than a dozen lectures.

But neither the philosophy nor the fisticuffs were able to fill the paper's coffers. It had been ill run from the start, was soon in a bad way, and on the eve of the 1914 war it was on

the point of closing down. The campaigns of economic and political counter-espionage which it ran between 1914 and 1919 put new life into it. The Malvy case was the most famous, and for a few years the paper displayed real vigour. Then it began to slide downhill again till 1924.

What put it on its feet once more, as will be seen, were the long-term public campaigns which it skilfully mounted, first over the death of young Daudet in 1923, and then over the French internal troubles of 1934. These campaigns not only replenished the paper's funds; they took it almost to the threshold of prosperity.

Thus it is not too much to say that for thirty-five years, *L'Action Française* lived almost exclusively on blackmail, the fomenting of civil strife and the exploitation of scandals and national disasters.

In 1942, at the end of a career which had been devoted almost entirely to the preaching of hatred and violence, Léon Daudet died peacefully in his bed at a ripe old age. In 1944, when France was liberated, Charles Maurras was flung into prison, and the official organ of hundred per cent nationalism ended its poisonous existence. It was, however, to leave behind it a disturbing tradition.

An extraordinary example of the extravagance of *L'Action Française's* methods was shown during the Dufresne case. When M. Dufresne, a Paris theatrical manager of peculiar personal habits, was found murdered in his office in 1932, Léon Daudet reported that detectives had found in the mouth of the dead man a piece of human flesh whose nature could be seen at a glance. The victim, he said, had been strangled, or knocked over the head in the course of an unnatural orgy, by a young sailor who had managed to get away despite his horrible mutilation.

It happened that a near relation of a politician who was a bugbear of Léon Daudet's was serving at the moment in the French navy. The great detective of *L'Action Française* did not hesitate for an instant: he linked the two men up and

launched an accusation on the offchance that it might hit home. He declared that the sailor had been secretly admitted into a Neuilly clinic where his unspeakable wound was being tended.

But Daudet went further. He accused the Paris press of deliberately organizing a conspiracy of silence round this scandal. Cut to the quick, the news editor of a big daily paper sent one of his brightest reporters, M. Charles Favrel, to the author of the accusation with orders to ask him for details and to assure him that if the story was verified the full facts would be published. M. Favrel identified the clinic and went to see its medical director. The doctor might have pleaded medical secrecy, but he had no reason to, and he allowed his clinic to be searched from top to bottom. The search yielded nothing. There was no trace of a sailor and no patient suffering from the injuries described.

Favrel came back to Léon Daudet. He told him his inquiries had got him nowhere and asked for further details in confidence, if he had any.

'It would be a waste of time,' Daudet replied. 'Personally, I don't care a button for the story. Politics is what I'm after.'

The outstanding characteristic of the methods practised by *L'Action Française* was thus the resounding and reckless launching of scandals that splattered suspicion everywhere. If there were a mistake or a misjudgment, the artillery of obscene language would go on firing as merrily as ever to cover the retreat. But the mis-statements that it made were never corrected and the reputable press echoed the stories only too complacently.

Half the daily papers in France and almost all the weeklies up to 1940 followed, whether consciously or not, in the wake of *L'Action Française's* campaigns. A handful of them observed a prudent neutrality. Few indeed were those which openly fought them.

One of the most influential of the papers which made the running in the libel stakes was *Gringoire*, notorious before 1939



as the champion of appeasement, and after 1940 as the paladin of collaboration with Hitler. *Gringoire* claimed to speak for the majority of the public and did its best to lay down the law on international politics. It had a brilliant list of contributors and the best of contacts in official circles.

There is no doubt that it owed a great deal to *L'Action Française* and *vice versa*. One of its staff writers, M. Jean Pierre Maxence, considered the works of M. Léon Daudet to be models of clarity and level-headedness. Of *The Political Police* he wrote enthusiastically: 'Léon Daudet describes for us the Sûreté, its departments and its crimes simply, without extravagance and without ever raising his voice. He presents us with no evidence that is not certain to the point of incontrovertibility. Facts, documents, lucidity, all are here. His books illuminate without dazzling.'

What must dazzle the reader of today is the sheer *naïveté* of M. Jean Pierre Maxence—unless indeed he too was simply making fun of his public, which is not inherently improbable and matters little in any case. For there were on *Gringoire's* staff stars of an incomparably greater magnitude, whose light carried far further. The director of this gold mine of a paper had thus felt able to afford the services as a writer of M. André Tardieu, a Republican ex-Premier who had gone over to the Right-wing opposition and whose political evolution is extremely instructive.

In June 1929, M. Tardieu was Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior. Speaking in the Chamber, he officially denounced the alarming tactics which he saw taking shape in reactionary circles as a means of stirring up public opinion on the pretext of defending law and order. 'Ex-servicemen,' he said, 'are in danger of coming under the influence of certain people and certain parties who sometimes profess a keen sympathy for them. It is only with the idea of making use of them, and that way danger lies. The vast majority of ex-servicemen resent it when certain of their fellow-members allow themselves to be drawn into the agitation of factions

against which we may be forced to take action some day in defence of law and order.'

The Minister of the Interior displayed in that warning a foresight which enabled him to look five years into the future, for the Young Royalists carried the flag of the National Union of Ex-Servicemen with them in the Place de la Concorde riots of 6 February 1934.

On the following 30 July, M. Tardieu spoke at the Paris City Hall during the celebration of what French history knows as the 'Three Glorious Days'. These were the days of the July 1830 revolution, when Parisians died on the barricades they had built to defend the principles of liberty which the reactionary King Charles X had tried to suppress.

'The Republican régime,' M. Tardieu said, 'is the fourteenth system France has known in the last one hundred and fifty years, and it is the only one which has lasted. It represents the end of a long search, the search for the system best calculated to mobilize citizens for the service of the common weal. The great and daring project that the men of 1830 dreamed of and that our own days have seen realized is that of the people governing themselves at their own risk.'

Later, taking the chair at the dinner of the Association of superintendents and inspectors of the Sûreté Nationale, M. Tardieu said: .

'My friends, if I speak to you as frankly as I do, it is because I know you. I have had to do with you both as a deputy and as a Minister in more departments than one. In fact, everyone in France has to do with you, everyone needs you, and this feeling that the whole country needs you is at the root of your high ideals and of the lofty conception you have of your work and your duties. The police exists to safeguard law and order, and it is the respect for law and order that permits the development in the country of the atmosphere of reforms and of progress. You have flinched from no sacrifice to fulfil this task of yours, a task which is national, demo-

cratic and republican, and to carry out the manifold duties that weigh on your shoulders. I raise my glass to your Association, to this association of good men, good citizens, good officers who, on the day they entered the service of the State, gave it not only their loyalty, but their health too, and sometimes their lives. Yours is a service of which one is proud to be the head, and I tell you that with all my heart.'

In 1929, M. Tardieu's heart was evidently in the right place, on the Left. Finally, speaking in the Chamber once more, on 30 November of the same year, he protested against the immorality of the press.

The year before, a murderer named Peter Kuerten had maintained a reign of terror in Germany, particularly the city of Dusseldorf, by a succession of odious crimes. His favourite victims were children or young girls, and he would rape them, cut their throats and drink their blood. The 'Vampire of Dusseldorf', as the newspapers called him, was finally arrested after his eleventh murder, condemned to death and beheaded in 1929.

The French newspapers were short of copy that summer. There were few sensations at home to fill their pages, and a number of them had sent special correspondents to Germany, who had filed dispatches columns long on the 'Vampire's' execution and his life story.

Speaking at once as Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, M. Tardieu said he was shocked. 'I have told the various police services which it is my privilege to have under me,' he said, 'to resist a certain tendency in public taste on which my eminent friend Edouard Herriot was remarking in an article which I welcomed yesterday. The public displays a curiosity about crime. The smell of blood rises from the front pages of the newspapers, and when they haven't enough material at home to satisfy this sadistic taste, they send for the vampire of Dusseldorf. It is a bad habit against which we should all agree to take a stand with whatever influence we can exert on the various papers.'

Long before he became a Minister, at the very outset of his career, M. André Tardieu had won distinction as a journalist. He had then become a high official in the Ministry of the Interior. His was a brilliant and a well-stocked mind and he knew inside out the whole machinery of politics and of government.

Four times in the course of a single year he had expressed himself in public with remarkable clarity, in the speeches to which reference has just been made, on the very subjects with which we are dealing here. In 1929 he was denouncing the mobilization of the reactionary forces. He was vaunting the superiority of the Republican régime. He was expressing his pride in the police and his delight in being at their head.

Two years later, M. Tardieu was no longer a Minister. After a little vacillation his heart had insensibly slipped from the Left to the Right. He was taken on by *Gringoire*, and unashamedly contradicted himself all along the line. He joined the Right-wing Opposition. He launched an all-out attack on the Republic and its institutions. He discovered that there were murderers in the Sûreté Générale. Finally his servile imitation of Léon Daudet saw him writing a preposterous story of police crimes which betrayed him into just that press immorality which he had been denouncing two years before.

When he had been Minister of the Interior and head of the Government he had seemed a strong and far-sighted statesman. Now that he was a journalist, and on the other side of the barricade, he deliberately revived the vampire of Dusseldorf stunt and served it up to his readers.

M. Tardieu's *volte-face* was by no means the only one, but it was one of the most sensational. It is only quoted to give a picture of the mentality of the opposition press and politics of the time, and of their systematic hostility to a police force which they could not get their hands on. Propaganda of this kind could be embarrassing even when it was only M. Maxence who signed it. When it appeared under the signature of an ex-Premier with the reputation of M. Tardieu

it was infinitely more dangerous, as events were soon to show.

In 1936, Léon Blum, then Prime Minister, was attacked in his car on the Boulevard St Germain by Young Royalists and injured. The police took the matter up and a case was opened.

The offices of *L'Action Française* were searched, papers were seized, and Charles Maurras, veteran apologist of political assassination, found himself facing a police court prosecution.

Up to that moment, the Royalist gangs had been on velvet. Now, for the first time for many years they were up against someone who was determined to resist them.

The incident raised the question of the dissolution of the various anti-Parliamentary leagues. To M. Roger Salengro, Minister of the Interior, fell the task of carrying out the measures decided on and reporting to Parliament. With *Gringoire* at its head, the reactionary press set out to drag his name in the dust. It did not disdain the vilest libels. Worn out by the cares of office, disheartened and disgusted, the Minister gave up the fight and came home one night to commit suicide.

Just as, twenty-five years before, they had got Jaurès murdered by their venomous press campaigns, so Daudet, Maurras, Jean-Pierre Maxence and Co. had killed Roger Salengro. And the days of his successor in office, Marx Dormoy, were already numbered.

Léon Daudet's admirers insist on representing his aggressive behaviour as that of an unhappy martyr, unbalanced by sorrow. It is a little difficult all the same to believe in the disinterestedness of a man who was at such pains to organize the exploitation of his literary and journalistic production.

In 1924, with his prosecution of the Sûreté officers in full swing, he launched in his paper an anguished appeal for money. The sum he required for his electoral campaign was two million francs, £40,000 at present values.

*L'Action Française* saw big; Léon Daudet was not going to

save his country on the cheap. He flayed the wealthy supporters who had remained deaf to his demands and who did not display the proper eagerness to repay the price of blood. It was not Léon Daudet's blood, of course, but the blood he was always ready to see shed around him.

'When are we going to see some big contributions,' he wrote, '25,000, 50,000 and 100,000 francs? If richer people want to give more, there's nothing to stop them. Who's going to set the big example? For our part, we have paid our debt to the country at a cruel cost with the assassination of a hero, Marius Plateau, and of a noble child, Philippe Daudet. The faith that can move mountains can also move subscribers'.

This indeed was to rattle the collecting box over the coffin-lid. Daudet had befuddled his readers' minds; now he was going to pick their pockets.

But the editor-in-chief of *L'Action Française* was not far out in his calculations. Faith moved quite a number of subscribers, of whom not a few, including the most generous, accompanied their donations with such messages as, 'hoping for the victory of French fascism'. The total collected not only exceeded the two million francs asked for: it reached more than three million. Though Léon Daudet was defeated in the elections in May, 1924, he did nothing to discourage the flow of money and favoured his believers with a prophetic encouragement:

'The *Action Française* is today the only patriotic national force which is capable of compelling recognition by Paris, the Government and the régime. When the fateful hour sounds, either constitutional methods or force will give us the power which we shall seek from them. Something tells me that we shall not have to wait long.'

Léon Daudet was once more beaten when he stood in the senatorial elections in Anjou a little later. The fundamental inconsistency of his monarchist propaganda—which had more than once been disowned by the most eminent representatives of the cause—and the endless repetition of his

frenzied attacks on irreproachable people ended by repelling a proportion of his readers. On the political plane, he had shown his limitations once for all during the four years he sat in Parliament.

A little later, the Roman Catholic hierarchy grew anxious over the nature of his influence in Catholic circles. It warned the clergy against the immorality of his writings and of his journalistic campaigns. A decision of the Holy Office, promulgated in a statement by the cardinals, archbishops and bishops of France, forbade the faithful to publish, distribute or read the writings of Charles Maurras and of Léon Daudet on the grounds of heresy.

'The *Action Française* movement has been condemned,' the statement said, 'and the paper has been put on the Index because the movement looks for its leaders and teachers to men who have taken up positions inconsistent with Catholic faith and morals.'

'What shall we say of the violent controversies in which *L'Action Française* specializes? These campaigns are only too often contrary to the spirit of the gospels, they do not enlighten and they too easily arouse the worst passions: hatred and contempt for others.'

'Certain people are spreading the story that the Pope has been hoodwinked, that Pius XI has allowed himself to be taken in by hostile intrigues, that the step he has taken is a political move designed to split the French Catholic forces.'

'We blush to have to deny here accusations which are as improbable as they are insulting. Is it to be tolerated that people should treat the Pope and his appointed representatives in this manner, that they should cast a fog of suspicion over pontifical acts and run up their fictions without a single proof?'

'Are we to allow a group of men to pretend, for political ends, to a monopoly of patriotism and to deny it to the bishops and the Catholics of France? No, to say, as they have

dared to do, that to submit to the Pope would be to commit parricide against France is an error and an insult. It is also a hateful machination.'

It is more than a pity that the same thing could not be done in the political field, and that no Ministerial spokesman, buoyed up with the Republican faith, was inspired to take the same line in the Chamber and to put the organ of hundred per cent nationalism on the Index. Many misfortunes might well have been spared us if he had.

The headquarters of *L'Action Française* were situated in a spacious set of offices in the rue de Rome, in the heart of Paris, and despite its numerous difficulties it had become one of the foremost papers in the capital. But its overheads were heavy, and it had an expensive staff to maintain.

Apart from its two editors-in-chief, its best-known contributors were Maurice Pujo, Admiral Schwerer, President of the *Action Française* League, who specialized in the Dreyfus case and was an expert on ballistics, the sculptor Maxime Réal del Sarte, Jacques Bainville, Binet-Valmer and Colonel de Vesins. Then there was Philippe Roulland, the tough who commanded the Young Royalist strong-arm squads, as ready to beat up an opponent or force castor oil down the throat of a critic as they were to stick up a fly-poster or deface a Republican statue. Finally there were Pierre Lecoeur, the news editor, the notorious Dr Martin, and the no less notorious Joseph Darnand, head of the Vichy militia, both of whom we shall meet again under the occupation.

When Darnand was decorated with the Legion of Honour in April 1927, at a celebration specially organized in the offices of *L'Action Française*, he showed how violent his feelings were even then. He ceremonially spat on the case containing the cross when the representative of the Chancellery of the Legion whom he had chosen as his sponsor handed it to him.

'If I may be allowed on a day like this to express one regret,' the recipient of the honour said by way of thanks, 'it is that I am being decorated in the name of the President of



the Republic. May King Jean soon return to the throne of his fathers.'

In addition to such friendly family reunions, which were paid for by the generosity of the subscribers, the editor-in-chief had organized a shop at the rue de Rome offices where all sorts of goods could be obtained. It sold groceries, toys, neckties, perfumery, Royalist badges, swagger sticks for Young Royalists and statuettes of Joan of Arc sculptured by M. Réal del Sarte.

But even the most ingenious shifts could not indefinitely keep the paper off the rocks on to which it was perpetually drifting. It was Pierre Lecoœur, the news editor, who was responsible for discovering a new way of filling the scandal columns which were a speciality of the paper.

Lecoœur, who was Léon Daudet's confidential agent, had built up a first-rate set of files. Tireless, silent and shrewd, he could say at a moment's notice what this or that Minister or any other enemy of the cause had been doing at a given hour of a given day. All the same, his means of investigation had their limits, and he was seeking for new openings when a succession of chances put him in contact with one that exceeded anything he could have hoped for.

A post office worker who was a member of the *Action Française* League called at his office one day with a map of Paris which showed the telephone lines with the relay stations also marked in. The caller explained that in t Avenue Trudaine there was a sewer manhole through which one could get to the cable which ran between the Coliseum and the principal State broadcasting station. One would only have to remove a couple of screws to be able to substitute one's voice for that of the announcer and broadcast something very different from the official news bulletin. For example, one could announce that the Government had been overturned and that revolutionary forces had occupied the Ministries.

The idea was tempting, but it would be dangerous to

carry out and would be no more than a short-lived hoax. Lecoeur bore it in mind, however, and set about planning to use it in another way with the help of a woman member of the League who was a technical employee of the telephone service. At the moment she was listening-in at the Auteuil telephone exchange on the line of M. Malvy, the former Minister of the Interior.

Lecoeur sent for her and asked her whether, if the appropriate apparatus were provided, it would be possible to listen in on an ordinary telephone line to the conversation of any other subscriber. When she told him it would, he carried out a number of experiments, bought a second-hand private branch exchange, rented an isolated villa and installed the necessary equipment. Then in the name of a purely imaginary Association of Philatelists, he rented three outside lines from the post office.

The telephone technician, who had meantime lost her post office job, promptly set to work. Every leading figure in Paris, whether he was Minister or judge, cleric or Government official, was methodically listened-in to till the day when the Préfecture of Police seemed to have smelt a rat. Lecoeur suspended operations, and after an interval took his private branch exchange to the offices of *L'Action Française* where he got two additional outside lines with no trouble at all.

In the rue de Rome offices, the system worked overtime, and the harvest of information was more and more plentiful. In 1927 the measures taken against *L'Action Française* by the Church authorities were what most concerned its chiefs, so the lines of the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris and the Papal Nuncio received special attention, as did those of other leading ecclesiastical dignitaries, and the Young Royalists prepared their church-door demonstrations on the basis of the information gleaned. In the political world, all the principal Ministers and ex-Ministers were listened-in to whenever it seemed likely that information from their private conversations would be topical.

Maurras became more and more enthusiastic over the verbatim reports which Lecoœur brought him. Daudet was cock-a-hoop, and would have liked to use all the ammunition brought in as it came to hand, but he had to restrain himself lest the source of so much prosperity dried up again.

The business went on for years, and the clandestine listening-in post of the Royalist paper, whose outpost the co-editors adapted as their fancy dictated, furnished them with a never-failing supply of material for their speculations.

Before it was finally closed down, this not very reputable arrangement provided *L'Action Française* with another very big boost in its circulation.

When Léon Daudet's prosecution of the Sûreté officers and other persons he accused of his son's murder was dismissed, Chief Inspector Delange and Superintendent Colombo, and the taxi-driver Bajot, who had been the most outrageously defamed, turned on their accuser and took action against him in the courts. And the whole case began all over again in the columns of *L'Action Française*.

Léon Daudet and Delest, the manager of the paper, were convicted of criminal libel, and by 1927 they had run through the whole gamut of delaying actions and appeals. Since both had previous convictions, neither of them could hope for the benefit of the First Offenders' Act, and in June they were officially notified that their prison sentences were confirmed.

It was a magnificent chance to beat the big drum Daudet issued a challenge to the Government.

'The cup of abomination is running over,' he wrote. 'I shall not present myself, at one p.m., at the place where the Public Prosecutor has ordered me to be. From today on, I am moving my home, my writing table and my inkpot to the rue de Rome, in the midst of my colleagues and friends. I expect Poincaré, Barthou, Albert Sarraut, Herriot and Painlevé to come in person to arrest me, in the name of the sovereign people, which is seizing on the occasion to show them its universal disgust.'

And the editor-in-chief of *L'Action Française* did indeed leave his home and set up house in the rue de Rome, in the offices of his paper and under the protection of his supporters, who numbered nearly a thousand. The building was barricaded inside, and was surrounded outside by a strong cordon of police. The siege had begun.

Some of the Royalist editor's friends, with their usual presumption, thought that the people of Paris would rise in defence of Léon Daudet, since he was guilty of no more, in his own words, than 'the crime of being a father'. Led by Mme Daudet, they went down to the boulevards and perambulated the central streets to test the reactions of the capital. They were sadly disappointed. Paris was hopelessly calm. Its citizens continued to go about their business and did not seem to care a penny whether Léon Daudet was at odds with the prison administration or not. It was the basest ingratitude.

Next the mother of the rebel, Mme Alphonse Daudet, in a letter dated 12 June, appealed to Prime Minister Poincaré's better feelings. He replied on the 14th in his own hand:

Madame,

I am deeply touched by your letter, but I feel no remorse at all. The day your unfortunate grandson was identified at the Lariboisière Hospital, M. Allard, M. Jacques Bainville and M. Lucien Bernard called on me. They came to ask me, on behalf of your son, to give orders for the body to be taken back to his house secretly. Doctor Bernard told me that the child was suffering from compulsive flight which, he said, invariably ends in suicide. I did what was necessary for your unfortunate grandson to be taken home to his parents. Since then, no one has hoped more fervently than I that the truth about the cause of his death should be established beyond doubt. The Minister of Justice had my complete agreement when, only a short time ago, he took action to secure a review of

the case, despite the opinion of the commission concerned. Once the sentence was confirmed, I would have been only too glad for it not to have been enforced. I should have been glad out of consideration for a father who has suffered much. I should have been glad too because of abominable calumnies with which your son has permitted himself, these last few years, to deluge me and my family, and which showed me to what a degree he had been unbalanced by his sorrow. In view, however, of the attacks he has made on the judiciary and the challenges he has issued to the government, the Cabinet feels that the law must take its course.

Yours faithfully,  
Poincaré.

The siege of the rue de Rome went on for five days, and contrary to all expectation, the people of France had not risen yet. Time began to seem rather long in the Royalist camp.

Early on the morning of 13 June, the Prefect of Police with his staff presented himself at the gates of the citadel, asked to see Léon Daudet and addressed to him at short range an urgent invitation to surrender. Léon Daudet replied in his most theatrical terms:

‘Monsieur Préfet,’ he said, ‘you have just spoken in humane terms amid the most inhuman circumstances. I do not want fathers of families to suffer up and down the country in a cause which isn’t a political one. I don’t want to unleash civil war throughout France. Monsieur Préfet, I surrender, to the cry of “Long Live France!”’

The scenario had been carefully worked out. The ceremony ended with a hearty round of applause, and after affectionate farewells all round the prisoner took his seat in the Prefect’s car, which took him to the Santé prison.

The curtain had fallen on the penultimate scene in this extravagant tragi-comedy. The last scene was that of the

escape, a masterpiece of imagination, which was due to the telephonist of *L'Action Française's* clandestine switchboard.

As chance would have it, she found herself listening one day to a telephone conversation between the Governor of the Santé prison and the director of the Cochin Hospital, where an anarchist named Girardin, then on hunger-strike, was a patient.

'I've just this moment received orders over the telephone from the Ministry of the Interior to release Girardin,' the Governor of the Santé was saying. 'Would you be good enough to let him out and to have him escorted here so that I can go through the necessary formalities of releasing him. You'll be getting a written confirmation in the course of the day, but let him out at once.'

The conversation lit the telephonist's imagination like a lightning flash. What had just been done for Girardin would surely be done for Léon Daudet. It was just a question of working things out.

She put the proposal up to Lecoœur, who approved it and worked out with her in detail the practical plan of campaign. This was finally adopted at a secret meeting of Royalist leaders attended by Mme Léon Daudet, Bernard de Vesins, Réal del Sarte and his brother, and Maurice Pujo.

Mme Léon Daudet had just learned that the proprietor of the restaurant licensed by the authorities to serve meals to prisoners had disposed of his business. This could only be with the idea of having Léon Daudet poisoned. A decision must be taken urgently, if possible immediately.

The telephonist asked for half an hour's grace to work out details of the operation and to assign the various actors their parts. On closer examination the job showed that it was not going to be as simple as it had seemed. It was easy enough to engage the prison line, but what then? If the prison telephonist cut off, the Governor of the Santé would ring back the Ministry of the Interior for confirmation and the whole scheme would fall through.

There was only one way: to engage all the lines of the Ministry of the Interior for as long as possible by arranging for members of the League who were in the plot to ring up the Ministry. Thus, if the Santé prison rang the Ministry for confirmation, it would be told with perfect truth that all the numbers were engaged. The clandestine operator at *L'Action Française* could then pick up the prison line and put it on to a speaker who would confirm the order to set M. Daudet free.

The plan was agreed to with enthusiasm. Pierre Lecoecur was to take the part of the Minister of the Interior and would ring the Governor of the Santé, not from *L'Action Française's* offices, but from the private address of a trustworthy Young Royalist. André Réal del Sarte was cast as the Minister's private secretary, and would stand by to take the confirmatory telephone call that the Governor of the Santé was bound to put through. A dozen hand-picked accomplices took up their stations at other telephones, ready to engage all the twelve lines of the Ministry of the Interior. Their orders were to keep them engaged as long as they could, and if necessary to ring back again and again.

Zero hour was fixed at ten past twelve, when the Ministry staff would have left for lunch, and all watches were carefully synchronized.

Punctually at ten past twelve the clandestine operator rang Gobelins 0259. The Governor of the Santé, M. Catry, answered.

'Hullo? Is that the Governor of the Santé? This is the private secretary of the Minister of the Interior. Hold the line, the Minister wants to talk to you.'

Pierre Lecoecur picked up the telephone and spoke in an assumed voice:

'The Minister here. The Cabinet has just taken an important decision which I want to tell you of personally. We have decided to release Daudet, Delest and Semart immediately, under a special free pardon which will be subject to review. On the other hand, it is essential that this step

shouldn't be used as a pretext for any demonstrations. So I want you to take the necessary action at once, as you did in the case of Girardin. Can you arrange for these prisoners to be discharged within half an hour?'

'Yes, sir, it can be done.'

'Excellent. I'm leaving the Ministry in a moment. You will report back to my private secretary.'

'Very good, sir.'

Lecoœur had played his part. The clandestine operator cut him off but kept the Santé line. A moment or two later M. Catry, as a precaution, rang back, and imagining that he was talking to the exchange operator, asked for the Minister of the Interior. In fact, of course, it was the operator at *L'Action Française* that he was talking to, and she put him through at once to André Réal del Sartre.

'The Minister's private secretary here. What can I do for you?'

'I've just received instructions from the Minister that I wanted to have confirmed.'

'You're referring to the release of Daudet, Delest and Semart?'

'Precisely.'

'Do you mean to say you've done nothing about it? What are you waiting for? We're behind schedule already. You're covered. I'll be waiting for your report.'

'Very good.'

The Governor of the Santé dashed to the cells where Daudet and Delest were finishing their lunch and told them the good news. He did the same for the Communist Semart, who did not understand a thing. The bogus Minister of the Interior had indeed only used his name to lend verisimilitude to an act of clemency which was thus extended to both political extremes. Everyone was in high spirits, there were embraces all round and the necessary formalities went through in a moment.

The car of *L'Action Française's* editor-in-chief had been



waiting in the rue de la Santé for half an hour. Daudet and Dejeat calmly took their seats in it, and by one o'clock they were out of harm's way.

By four o'clock, enormous headlines in the evening papers were announcing Léon Daudet's escape. At the offices of *L'Action Française* jubilation knew no bounds.

In order to put the authorities off the scent, the story was put about that a Young Royalist had slipped into the Ministry of the Interior and had telephoned the order to free Daudet from an office in the building. There was not a word of truth in it. The key parts in the operation had been played by three people, the switchboard operator, Charlotte Montard, Pierre Lecoœur and André Réal del Sarte, with the support of the dozen accomplices who kept the telephone lines of the Ministry of the Interior engaged for nearly half an hour. That did not stop the Young Royalists from claiming all the credit of the affair, and Maurice Pujo solemnly wrote in *L'Action Française* that they had not been a moment too soon in their rescue of Daudet, who 'was on the point of being murdered'.

The leg-pull had been a brilliant success. It set the whole of Paris laughing, with the exception of the Governor of the Santé, who was suspended, and the clandestine switchboard operator, the central figure in the affair, who was left in the lurch by her employers and thrown into prison in their place.

As to the hero of this bit of knock-about fun, the last had by no means been heard of him. For a while he took refuge in Brussels, where he struck attitudes as a martyr suffering in an undeserved exile. Before long, however, he was to reappear in Paris, up to all his tricks again.

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## The Sûreté

AN ACCUSATION is worth as much as the man who makes it.

In order to put matters in their proper light and to explain just what really happened, it has been necessary to dwell at some length on what has been called 'the Philippe Daudet enigma', on the man who started it, and on the background against which it developed. Let us then sum up what we have discovered.

The case of young Daudet was a type of case which is unhappily becoming more and more frequent, that of an ailing and maladjusted child. The story of his suicide, which was reported in the papers of 24 November 1923 in a three-line paragraph, had a week later been blown up out of all proportion to its real significance.

Starting with this little bit of 'news in brief', which they had overnight turned into a murder, the Royalist leaders had exploited it quite shamelessly, as much out of sheer opportunism as out of political zeal, one motive reinforcing the other and *vice versa*. And they had brought off a master stroke.

Within less than ten years, they had built up a formidable apparatus for civil war, the key mechanisms in which, after a short try-out in peacetime, continued to work under the German occupation and took toll of hundreds, if not thousands, of French lives.

The point, as far as the writer is aware, has not been clearly made before, and it deserves to be known. It will be the aim of this study to prove it by putting before the reader the uncontested facts. But before we tackle this essential part of the

subject, it will probably be as well to pursue a little further the contrast between fact and fiction by giving some account of what the Sûreté's organization and activities really amounted to, an account which, with a few minor changes, still holds good today.

Speaking one day in 1946 in the debate on the Ministry of the Interior's estimates, a member of the National Assembly—who was protesting against the reinstatement of a superintendent on whom he looked as a 'collaborationist'—called for a token reduction of 1,000 francs on the item set down for the police service. To emphasize his indignation, the honourable member added:

'What makes matters even worse is that this superintendent has been reinstated in the Criminal Investigation department, that is to say in a political police force.'

Maybe the speaker had not caught up with the times and thought that police headquarters were still at Vichy, under the reign of Joseph Darnard. A lot of water had passed under the bridges since then. Yet not a single deputy in the House, nor for that matter a single Minister, took the statement up.

Since this easy talk of the 'political police' continues to get a hearing, even in the National Assembly, it is easy to understand why, twenty-five years earlier, when it was a lot less threadbare, it proved such a gold-mine for *L'Action Française*.

Prejudices die hard. But of all the impostures the Realists put over, the most bare-faced, the slickest, the most masterly was, first, that they succeeded in persuading readers of this generation of the continued existence of an institution which is anti-republican in the nature of it, and which had been dead for ninety years. And then that they located this imaginary institution in the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation department, that is to say the very body which from the administrative and juridical point of view formed the greatest contrast with it.

It was their master-falsehood which, once and for all,

provided an impenetrable camouflage for all their others. It was a classic of tall stories, imposing in its enormity; it was a lie of such a resounding kind that readers of every class took it in and swallowed it confidently without dreaming of querying its source or questioning its good sense.

Yet the political police—France has had reason to know it at more than one period—has never been anything but an arbitrary force, at the orders of an absolute ruler, which refuses the citizen the right of free action, of free speech and even of free thought in the political and social fields. Wherever it has existed, and wherever it still exists today, common law must bow before it. Its operations are the first step towards the establishment of extraordinary courts or administrative tribunals, the prime consideration in whose judgments is the interests of the State.

Before the German occupation in 1940, the last time France had any real experience of a political police had come with the application of the State Security Act promulgated by Napoleon III in 1858, after Orsini's attempt on his life. This in its turn was inspired by the provisions made by the revolutionary courts in 1793 for the supervision and trial of suspected counter-revolutionaries.

Under the terms of the 1858 law, the Emperor was granted a discretionary jurisdiction over all persons who had been previously convicted of political offences, or who had been found guilty of agitation inside the country, of membership of secret societies, or of collaborating in illegal meetings or opposition papers. And the Minister of the Interior was empowered to sentence to transportation or exile any citizen who was convicted of having 'carried out agitation or kept up a secret correspondence, either inside the country or abroad'.

It has already been shown—and further proofs will be offered—that particularly between 1920 and 1940, the champions of hundred per cent nationalism had carried out agitations and kept up a secret correspondence with a view

to overthrowing the republican régime, against which they had openly declared war.

It should be crystal clear that the existence at this period of a political police, methodically organized on the lines laid down in the former State Security Act, is given the lie by the very existence, not to speak of the agitation, of the Royalist party and by the complete licence granted to the daily incitements that appeared in *L'Action Française*.

What would have been the use of a political police, it may well be asked, if it had not been able to force the bitterest enemies of the Republic to keep their mouths shut? Had such a police existed, the Royalist offices could have been closed down in less than twenty-four hours, and their entire staff sent to penal servitude.

What is more, the pure and simple application of existing laws would have been enough for that; it has worked, on other occasions, every time the authorities have thought it proper to resort to it. Since they had disdained to use the legal powers they already had, they had less than no need to call in the dangerous services of a secret police, which did not exist in any event, and which has long been condemned by public opinion.

In the years which immediately preceded the establishment in 1907 of the Criminal Investigation department, or mobile police, the Sûreté Générale occupied a comparatively modest position in the Ministry of the Interior. Its quarters were not spacious and it consisted all in all of two or three administrative offices and a headquarters detachment of superintendents and inspectors of specialized police under the command of a chief superintendent. The Commissioner of the Sûreté was as often as not a high official of the Ministry, or of the prefectural department, which is concerned with local government.

The administrative offices were responsible for the control, management and general administration of the department as a whole, and in theory supervised the working of the

specialized police and the various municipal police forces. As to the non-administrative headquarters detachment, it bore the unassuming title of the 'Records Squad', and was sub-divided into secondary squads which covered General Intelligence, Racecourses and Gaming Establishments, Returns of Foreigners, and a photographic section. In all, some seventy superintendents and inspectors were responsible for records, the maintenance of order and the prevention and detection of crime, including counter-espionage work, throughout France.

In practice, most of the work was done by the local police forces, particularly by the Préfecture of Police, the only French police headquarters which up to that time had a sound and methodical organization.

The establishment in 1908 of a department which was to be definitely responsible for the detection of crime all over France cleared up a lot of confusion over the division of duties and was a welcome encouragement to all branches of the police.

The Criminal Investigation department became, as it were, the keystone of a coherent police service, whose essential tasks are the detection of espionage in peace time and the war against common law crime. From now on, any non-administrative department could be allotted its place in one of the following divisions :

(1) The foundation of the edifice was the local police, that is to say, the municipal forces, the local representatives of the State forces and the gendarmerie. The majority of them were uniformed men and they operated in limited areas. But the work they carried out involved at once administration, the prevention and detection of crime, and the maintenance of law and order. Though the Préfecture of Police has a special status, it belongs to the municipal class.

(2) The specialized police, whether its job was one of prevention or of investigation, came under the orders of the prefect of each department (a department is the equivalent

of a county). Its sphere of activities was confined to the department, or to a part of it. At stations, ports or airports, and at frontier stations, it might also, when occasion demanded, be called upon to do detective work.

(3) The mobile police, or Criminal Investigation section, was a force whose sphere of activities extended over several departments. Its job was essentially one of detection, and it came under the orders of the public prosecutors or their representatives, and of examining magistrates.

Such of the headquarters sections as had a department to themselves provided for liaison between, and co-ordination of, the local, departmental and regional work in their particular fields. These sections were the department of General Intelligence (previously the administrative branch), the Criminal Investigation department (previously the mobile police), and the Internal Supervision department (previously the counter-espionage section of the mobile police department). Superintendents and inspectors of the headquarters departments could be sent anywhere in France.

Finally the overall command, organization and supervision of the uniformed police, whether municipal or mobile, liaison with the gendarmerie—which comes under the War Office—the handling of the staff as a whole, the administration of the funds and equipment provided and the control of the central files and all the related departments, office-workers and outside men alike, naturally fell to the Commissioner of the Sûreté Nationale (previously the Sûreté Générale) and the administrative departments under his orders.

The years may have brought modifications in this organization—sub-divisions, innovations, and evolutions—but the three main divisions detailed above and their central departments still represent the skeleton of the system. Now, as ever, the most important of them is the local police, on whom the whole pyramid rests and without which no branch of the general police could possibly work.

Among the various tasks that fall to the lot of the Inspectorate of Criminal Investigation, the detection of espionage might appear at first sight to be one of the most important. In fact, the work of the counter-espionage section has been relatively limited by comparison with that of the sections dealing with common law crimes. More will be said about this later.

Criminals are more and more falling into a number of distinct types, which means that the police officers tracking them down must specialize in the same way. This principle of specialization goes right through the police, from the regional to the international level, and naturally affects the central departments too. Besides increasing day-to-day efficiency, this specialization also allows the graph of statistics for each group of offences to be more closely observed; thus the police can concentrate its attention on the form of offence which is most widespread at the moment, or the areas that are suffering the most. In the first four or five years after the First World War—as after the Second—criminal statistics leapt up. The number of arrests carried out by the Criminal Investigation department rose from 1,000 in 1918 to 1,750 in 1921 for indictable offences. Then the figures gradually returned to their normal level.

In 1924, statistics drawn up by the Ministry of Justice indicated that the situation was stationary, though a higher proportion of criminals were escaping punishment. At the Sûreté between 1924 and 1928 the figure of arrests continued to drop year by year till it was down to 609 for indictable offences. The decline in efficiency was alarming, and was proportionately the same in the provinces.

The reason was a big falling off in manpower. Gaps had occurred in the staff and they had not been filled. The cars that had been allotted to the mobile police in 1912, and which amounted to twenty for the whole of France, were completely worn out. The credits provided for the payment of officers' expenses on duty would only cover a week outside



the office per officer per month. There were other reasons too for the falling off in staff. The systematic smear campaigns launched against the Sûreté Générale had reached their peak at this period. Reflected as they were to some extent in the popular press, they made the officers' job harder and put effort and enterprise at a discount.

The rank and file policeman no longer felt that he enjoyed the confidence and support of the people he was working for. It was easy to see that the accusations being broadcast among the public were demoralizing the force within its very headquarters. Chief Inspector Delange, a man of the highest sense of duty and conscientiousness, a model of devotion and rectitude, an exemplary citizen and father, grew sick of being a defenceless cockshy and asked to be retired. This was a triumph for *L'Action Française*, which had written on 8 April 1928: 'The presence of this bandit of a Delange at the head of the Sûreté Générale has made Paris the happy hunting ground of the political assassin and the police murderer.'

In 1929 the crisis grew even more serious. It was put up to the Minister of the Interior, André Tardieu, who agreed to the plans for a complete new deal submitted to him by a new head of the department. Credits were voted which made the staff temporarily better off and gave them a certain amount of encouragement. The results were visible within the year and the curve of arrests leapt up. In Paris and the provinces alike, the superintendents and inspectors of the mobile police set great store by the moral support and confidence the judicial authorities give them.

It was under such conditions that a little band of officers at the Sûreté Générale and the Préfecture of Police, a band of men devoted to their calling and filled with an unbreakable team spirit, carried through to a successful conclusion some of the biggest criminal cases of the half-century. Faith in their job, tenacity and individual effort all contributed to their success, if not the gift of second sight which the outsider

often credits all too generously to the perfect detective but in which no real detective seriously believes.

The aim of a police investigation is to secure legal proof of a crime and the conviction of the prisoner, and the biggest factors in its success, I feel, are methodical work, well-kept files and up-to-date scientific procedures. Almost as important are the qualities of the detective: patience, a ripe knowledge of men and things, quick decision and a determination to finish the job. Now and then, I believe, the careful use of a paid informer's stories may be of value, though informers are very rarely straightforward. Finally, I believe in good luck; readiness to seize on it when it appears lies behind some of the most sensational successes of detective work.

At the risk of demolishing hardened prejudices and shattering cherished illusions, I would maintain, moreover, that the police officer, whether he is on the beat, in the station or in the laboratory, in plain clothes or in uniform, is a man like any other, neither cleverer nor stupider, neither better nor worse, and completely lacking in any supernatural powers.

The classic fictional type of inspired inspector, the Superintendent Maigrets and their compeers, like the picture of the detective as an oaf or a sadist, are purely literary creations. The public, however, has been brought up on these ideas, and it fails to realize how much room there is in detective work for blunders or for mistakes, just how much energy can do, just what good or bad luck may contribute to the solution of a case. The process of following up a trail from fact to fact does not satisfy the man in the street; indeed it makes him suspicious. Not knowing the real difficulties a detective runs up against, he tends to lose interest in a complicated case when it is not solved as speedily as his impatience leads him to expect, and falls for the popular versions of what goes on: the 'war of the forces'—the supposed enmity between the detectives working for the Sûreté and those employed by the Préfecture of Police—or the

'spontaneous confession room', where confessions are supposed to be extracted from prisoners by every sort of illicit pressure. Stories which are as legendary as the bowler hat and umbrella, the big moustache, hobnailed boots and uncouth accent which are the traditional marks of the Sûreté man.

There is indeed nothing unusual in the rivalry between two detectives or two police departments developing into cut-throat competition: the same thing can be seen in the civil service, in industry, in business and indeed in any human activity. All the same, if this antagonism were so deep-seated and all-pervading, not one crime in a hundred would ever be solved, for each cog in the machinery of law enforcement is dependent on half a dozen others for its efficient working. Since no officer and no department can claim by themselves to represent the whole police, it is obvious that no attack on it as a whole, no all-embracing criticism of its working methods, can hit home a hundred per cent.

Time and again in criminal cases, the culprit will be among the first witnesses to be heard. How is he to be rapidly and positively identified? How is he to be kept from getting away till evidence against him can be found? How is that evidence, supposing it exists, to be preserved intact? The answer to all these questions depends on the skill and conscientiousness of the detective. No one in his senses wants to detain an innocent man, but the danger of letting a murderer go free to commit more crimes is even more appalling.

The police officer's duties involve his applying the law to people who are often resistant to social discipline, and when necessity requires it he has got to use force. It cannot be denied, however, that his discretionary powers, which are as limited on paper as they are extensive in practice, leave room, if he is not careful, for abuses which may develop into a real tyranny. Physical maltreatment, threats, abuse, the dragging out of an interrogation till the suspect is exhausted,

the needless summoning of witnesses and the unnecessary waste of their time, breaking into a house or a flat without the excuse that an offence is actually being committed and without a warrant: all these practices form the subject of regular complaints in the courts, and the complaints unfortunately are not always imaginary.

All the same, if they are set against the thousands of operations carried out in the course of a year, they are a drop in the ocean. And the public—the law-abiding public, that is to say—would be in a better position to defend itself from such abuses if, instead of thinking of the police in terms half a century out of date, it were to stand up for its civic rights as it fulfils its civic duties.

One last consideration may be urged in defence of those representatives of the law who let their enthusiasm run away with them and as a reminder of the victims of the criminal who are too often forgotten in this kind of controversy. The number of criminals at liberty might well increase alarmingly if an experienced detective did not do all he could to establish the guilt of the suspect he was investigating before he handed him over to the public prosecutor.

When Chief Inspector Delange retired in 1929, I was promoted to his place and took over the Criminal Investigation and Counter-Espionage departments which he had been handling. A little later, responsibility for the Racecourse and Gaming Establishment squad was added to my duties.

Despite the temporary improvement in morale due to the improved conditions, underlying discontent persisted, and I soon discovered that a pall of distrust continued to hang over the whole organization. Any pretext was good enough to put the Sûreté Générale as a whole and the Criminal Investigation department in particular in the dock. Its critics fastened on the most insignificant incidents, or on individual mistakes from which no Government department, and indeed no private business, is exempt. Constantly on the look-out

as I was, I did my utmost to steer clear of the rocks without damping down the enthusiasm of my men. But it was impossible for me not to feel that when it came to making up their minds between the accusations of the press and the reports of my departments, my official superiors did not always accept the Sûreté version.

At the same time as I took over my predecessor's duties, I inherited the savage hostility of *L'Action Française*. In its columns, I became like him, a bandit, a traitor, a hired agent at the orders of the German, Otto Wolf, of the European Customs Union, which I had never even heard of. In a whole series of sensational cases in which Royalists were involved, such as the huge export of funds to Switzerland and Holland for tax-dodging purposes, the Breton autonomist outrages<sup>1</sup> and the Frogé case,<sup>2</sup> I had to lay myself out to justify the activities of the Sûreté officers and submit to humiliating administrative inquiries. The hardest-earned successes, the strictest compliance with legal formalities, were equally unavailing to dissipate the fog of suspicion which closed in ever more oppressively round the Sûreté Générale. Political expediency was henceforth to have its say when it came to deciding which was to count for most, a frown from Léon Daudet and his friends of the bar and the popular press, or the proved loyalty of the officers of the Sûreté Générale.

<sup>1</sup> On 31 August, 1931 a 'Breton autonomist party' founded the so-called Breton autonomist movement. They sought to attract attention by committing arson and sabotaging public property. Most of these 'autonomists' were implicated in collaborating with the German forces of occupation and after the war several of them died in tragic circumstances.

<sup>2</sup> In October, 1934, after a long investigation, Captain Georges Frogé, an officer stationed at Belfort, was sentenced to five years imprisonment for espionage on behalf of Germany. Later his sentence was partially remitted, and there was some agitation for the verdict to be reconsidered.

There could be no more illusions left once that was so, and the least-informed observer could see that disaster lay ahead. It is, of course, quite true that the police force was not everything in the running of the State, nor the Sûreté Générale everything in the police, or the Criminal Investigation department in the Sûreté. It is also true that the disavowal of an official here or there, though hardly a courageous action, would have mattered little had it advanced the higher interests of Republican institutions.

Unfortunately, the enemy camp was following a plan far more deep-laid, and minor concessions of this sort would never turn it from its aim. On the contrary, they would be hailed as proofs of weakness and encouragements to sedition.

The Criminal Investigation department was the spearhead of police activities, as the Royalist movement was the spearhead of political blackmail and subversion. The heads of *L'Action Française* knew perfectly well that the staff of the department which it pleased them to dub the 'political police' was in permanent contact all over France with the public prosecutors, the gendarmerie and the other branches of the police. They knew also that although the department's manpower might be limited, their numerous tie-ups and their wide prestige could easily make them—as in fact it did—a dangerous obstacle in the battle for which the opposition forces were preparing, and in which the tactics were beginning to become clear.

The Criminal Investigation department was a widely-scattered body of men on which no frontal attack could be made. So its opponents laid themselves out to sap it by bringing it into discredit. And in this smear campaign, the champions of hundred per cent nationalism could claim some outstanding successes on the eve of their first assault on the régime. Time was of course on their side. It was difficult to foresee just what point they would seize on to upset the balance of forces in the country. Events were irresistibly

sweeping us towards it, and the first opportunity that offered itself to them was to be the best.

As far as I was concerned, the opening shots in the battle were fired when I came up against the crook whose name was to become a household word and whose swindles were to furnish the pretext for the great attack.



The persistence and indeed the increase of banditry in Corsica had given French newspapers in 1930 a heaven-sent subject for highly-coloured reporting. Scarcely a week passed without a shooting, particularly in the central area of the island.

A dozen or so determined toughs, assisted by a handful of less eminent evil-doers and supported by the passive complicity of a fair proportion of the inhabitants, were maintaining a reign of terror from one end of Corsica to the other. The Spadas and the Perfettinis, the Bartolis and the Santonis, the Cavigliolis, the Torres and the Borneas killed each other and killed back, looted farms, sacked foresters' lodges, laid down the law to transport businesses, held up trains, raped women and kidnapped tourists.

This was none of the chivalrous banditry of fiction: the bandits of 1930 were plain gangsters. Perfettini and Bartoli, the most dreaded of them, were also well-known pimps, who had shown in continental France that they knew the business and were quite unlikely to be moved by sentimental considerations. Emboldened by the immunity they enjoyed, and by the ill-judged publicity the papers gave them, they dealt with the prefect and his officials on an equal footing, and even threatened them with reprisals if they interfered with electoral campaigns in which the bandits were interested.

The climax came when they began to attack gendarmes in their barracks. A number of isolated operations were mounted to clean up the situation, but the only real result was that more gendarmes were killed and wounded. Two in-

spectors of the Ajaccio mobile squad were sacrificed in vain in this way.

In April 1931, a non-commissioned officer and a gendarme of the Ciamanacce squad arrested a wanted man in the Col de Verde forest. In escorting him to their station, they had to pass through the big village of Palneca and in doing so went past a bar owned by Jacques Bartoli, the brother of the bandit, Joseph Bartoli. Since this was where the arrested man had been living, he asked permission to go in and get some clothes, and the gendarmes let him. But as soon as he was inside, he shouted for help, and Joseph Bartoli appeared.

Armed with a sporting gun, he covered the gendarmes and told them to lay down their rifles and get out. A number of men had rallied to Bartoli's side as soon as he appeared: the gendarmes were alone. Holding their hands up and leaving their prisoner and their arms behind them, they backed out of the bar. No sooner were they outside than Bartoli shot them down point-blank with two charges of buckshot before they could do anything to defend themselves. In a final gesture of savagery, he reloaded his gun, bent over them and finished them off with two more charges of shot in the back. Then, leaving the corpses in the street, he took to the maquis.

The alarm was given at once and Superintendent Natali, of the mobile police, checked the facts and started an investigation. At the same time, he drew the attention of the authorities in Paris to the indignation aroused by this savage murder, coming as it did as a climax to so many other crimes. He had himself for some months past, in collaboration with the departmental commander of the gendarmerie, been working out detailed plans for a large-scale operation which would end banditry once and for all.

It was indeed high time to act. M. Léon Noel, Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale and Chief Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior, instructed me to contact the Com-



missioner of the gendarmerie with a view to organizing a well-supported expedition to restore order. Plans had already been prepared and several platoons of the mobile Republican Guard were soon on their way to Corsica. With them and the local police force, supported by the Criminal Investigation department, we mounted a systematic offensive against the bandits in sector after sector of the island.

Within a matter of days, the bandits had been knocked out. Cut off from their strong-points and their supplies and faced with a fire power that was just as accurate as theirs, those of them who were not caught in ambushes surrendered one after another. I personally had an unforgettable experience in one mountain village which I visited, unescorted, with the Ajaccio public prosecutor. As we were entering it, a veteran of the vendetta was handed over to us by an imposing if heterogeneous procession of friends and relations, with the parish priest at its head. In less than a year the legendary bandits of Corsica had been wiped off the front pages of the papers: they will not appear there again for a very long time.

Similar operations in Sardinia, in Mussolini's time, and more recently in Sicily, necessitated the mobilization of thousands of men. It can hardly be contested, then, that the Corsican expedition, backed as it was by no more than a few platoons of gendarmerie and ten Sûreté inspectors, was an outstanding success.

The lesson was a simple one. In police work as in any other field, everything becomes simple once the responsible authorities at the top say clearly what they want and without overstepping the bounds of the law give their subordinates the means to carry out their instructions. If the Governments of the time had made up their minds to it and had chosen their confidants better, they could have cleaned up the maquis of the rue de Rome with no more difficulty, listening posts and all. And there is little doubt that the course of events in the years that followed would have been profoundly changed.

On the way back from one of my trips to Corsica in January, 1932, I stopped in Cannes to check up on the work of the Gaming Squad, which was in the thick of the big season at the casino.

The superintendent in charge reported to me at once on a serious incident which had occurred a week before and on which he had not yet taken any action. On Monday, 11 January, at one in the morning, he was told that a pack of stacked cards had been discovered at one of the open bank tables. The discovery had been made at nine o'clock the previous night, and there had thus been a delay of four hours in informing him.

When I had taken over the Gaming Squad in 1931, I decided to put an end to a number of friendly arrangements which had been customary between the managements of the gaming establishments and the Sûreté officers responsible for supervising them. I had circulated a memorandum in which I reminded officers that any suspicious action which had been either observed or officially reported should be made the subject of an investigation for the benefit of the Public Prosecutor.

There could be no doubt at all that the act of marking or interfering with a pack of cards which bore the official stamp, or of substituting another pack for it, constituted a fraudulent act under the law. In this particular case, the instrument of the fraud had not been confiscated, not a single witness had been examined, and the superintendent in charge had not even made a report.

For the sake of form, I gave instructions for a summary investigation, though I was well aware that after the delay that had occurred it was unlikely that any light would be shed on what had happened. I was determined, however, not to let the incident pass without some sort of action. So at the same time I considered the possibility of barring from the casino any players with a bad record who had been at the table when the fraud was discovered.

The Superintendent told me there had been four. Three of them were '*bedouins*', the gambling slang for players notorious as professional sharpers. The fourth was a certain Serge Alexandre, who regularly played for heavy stakes and on the day of the incident had happened to make a large sum of money. Serge Alexandre, who was almost unknown at the casinos under his real name, was in fact Stavisky, and he had already been barred from the tables.

Four months before Stavisky had brought off a minor victory at the casino of Saint Jean de Luz. Claiming that the order excluding him had been withdrawn, he had tried to bluff his way into the gaming rooms and had backed up his claim by producing a letter from a superintendent of the Criminal Investigation department, of whom he said he was the 'correspondent'.

The Superintendent at Saint Jean de Luz had telephoned the headquarters of the Gaming Squad in Paris for confirmation at the time. The secretary, after consulting me, had told him in my name: 'Stavisky is still barred on the Basque coast. Do not allow him to enter the Saint Jean de Luz casino. Pay no attention to the letter accrediting him as correspondent of a superintendent of the Criminal Investigation department.'

Stavisky had not waited for the local superintendent to check up on him. He had gone back to Paris and set the influential people he knew to work. He had thus managed to get from the authorities the permission I had just refused him, and the superintendent at Biarritz had received from the commissioner's office at the Sûreté a telegram couched in these terms: 'Tell the Prefect, with reference to our conversation of 9 September, 1931, that the person in question is authorized to enter the casinos of Biarritz and Saint Jean de Luz.'

That was how Stavisky gained his first victory over the head of the Gaming Squad of the Criminal Investigation department.

Shortly after this incident, I was sent a copy of a long and interesting report which dealt with the fraudulent activities of Stavisky at the Orléans municipal pawnshop and recalled earlier phases of the crook's career. The report had been drawn up by the financial section of the Préfecture of Police and duplicate copies of the original had been presented to the Public Prosecutors' offices in Paris and at Orléans. The copy which reached me was appended to a supplementary report by the divisional superintendent of the mobile police at Orléans. Thus Stavisky, *alias* Serge Alexandre, was far from being unknown to me.

When I got back to Paris after the Cannes incident, I recommended a number of disciplinary measures: the suspension of the casino director responsible and of the superintendent of the tables and the barring of the four suspect players. As far as Stavisky was concerned, the step amounted to no more than the enforcement of a previous decision, which had been provisionally suspended, as that at Saint Jean de Luz had just been.

When he returned to Cannes a week later and tried to enter the casino, Stavisky was stopped by the departmental superintendent, whom I had had warned. Stavisky went up in the air and talked of his powerful friends. The superintendent was sufficiently impressed to ring me up and I saw at once that he knew nothing of Stavisky's past. I set his mind at rest by telling him that I would take full responsibility for ordering him to keep the crook out and promised to send him for his further information a memorandum on Stavisky's background.

On my instructions, a secretary went through the Stavisky file and made a *précis* of the information there, which emerged as a four-page memorandum. It was based for the most part on the report and the additional material which I had received from Orléans, and it recalled in detail the past activities of Stavisky, who was known as 'the bank swindler'. A copy of this memorandum was sent to every department of

the Sûreté Générale and to every officer of the Gaming Squad for their information.

With this record to back them, the measures I had recommended to my superiors as a result of the Cannes incident were accepted, and six men were barred from the rooms. I very soon learned, however, that the people concerned had not accepted this decision lying down, and that steps to reverse it would soon be taken at a high level. I dissociated myself in advance from any such move, and on 24 May 1932, after having discussed the matter with the Commissioner of the Sûreté, I handed over a minute of protest in the following terms:

‘It has come to my knowledge that the authorities may be considering lifting the measures barring him from gaming rooms previously imposed on the man Stavisky. In this connection I would recall that Stavisky is a professional criminal who has more than once been prosecuted and convicted in the following circumstances.’ (The *précis* of the Stavisky file followed.)

The minute concluded: ‘It is not known what kind of activities Stavisky is engaged in at the moment, but it is incontestable that he has almost always provided himself with funds by the running of fraudulent businesses. In most cases, he has been clever enough not to be caught. In view, however, of his past, his gambling habits and his prodigal spending it would be surprising if he were not sooner or later to be mixed up again in some kind of shady undertaking.’

At the same time as I handed over my minute, I referred verbally to vague reports I had heard of a big scandal in the offing, in which a number of political figures might be involved.

My labours were in vain. The decision to bar Stavisky from the gambling rooms, taken on my recommendation, dates from 25 March 1932. My minute of protest against its withdrawal was handed in on 24 May. Despite the official opposition of the administrative office concerned, and my

own, all the gaming establishments of France were once more thrown open to Stavisky by a Ministerial decision of 2 July 1932, taken with the approval of the Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale.

There was nothing I could do. The crook had won all along the line. For another year he was to continue to stake at the tables huge sums of money whose origins became more and more doubtful.

After this double defeat, I could not but feel that I was not the man to be in charge of the Gaming Squad of the police and asked to be relieved of this position. My suggestion was accepted with alacrity and I was warmly congratulated on it.

Nevertheless, I continued to search for some means which would allow me to take an official hand in one or other of the cases pending against Stavisky, or to obtain enough evidence to start a new prosecution. If I had to take action some day, I thought, it would be as well to do so with a strong set of cards in my hand so that I should not run the risk of having to climb down.

Unfortunately the decisive document, of which a number of copies were already circulating round Paris and in offices close to mine, did not reach me in time. It was not only at Cannes and at Saint Jean de Luz that the last cards were being dealt and the last stakes being put down. No warning and no protest could now stop the current that was racing towards the cataract.

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## Scandals

THE comparatively unimportant story of the two casinos had taught me at the Sûreté Générale that I was not strong enough to challenge such a redoubtable adversary as Stavisky. About the same time, a similar lesson, just as conclusive but on a far bigger scale, was being driven home at the Criminal Investigation department of the Préfecture of Police. It was there that a file had been built up on the young Stavisky, budding criminal as he then was, from the moment he first strayed from the path of rectitude. The key to the whole affair was there.

The head of the department was my friend and colleague, Edmond Pachot, divisional superintendent, doctor of law and specialist in financial affairs. The representations he made, both to the Prefect of Police and to the magistrate at the head of the financial department of the Public Prosecutor's office, had implications infinitely wider than those I had made at the Sûreté Générale. They did not come an inch nearer succeeding. Pachot declared later that every time he raised the question of arresting Stavisky 'he had the impression that he was embarrassing everyone' and that his superiors 'wanted nothing more than to see his back'.

Pachot knew Stavisky well personally, but he knew him even better through the long succession of investigations he had carried out into the crook's activities. Here is the essence of his story as it emerges from the Préfecture's files.

Alexandre (Sacha for short) Stavisky was of Russian origin and made his first appearance in business in 1909 when he rented the Marigny Theatre to put on a music hall pro-

gramme. He secured backers and engaged a staff, but having spent the money, never got as far as mounting a show. Proceedings were started against him but he launched new swindles to pay off the victims of the old and for some years extracted considerable sums from an elderly lady who had fallen for his charms. Even she, however, finally brought a charge of fraud against him.

In 1923 Stavisky was implicated in the *Valdivia* affair,<sup>1</sup> when he was caught dealing in shares stolen from the liner *Valdivia*, but it was not till 1924 that he was arrested, for the first time. The charge was forgery: by skilful penmanship he had transformed the figures on a cheque made out to him from 600 to 48,000 francs. No sooner was he granted bail than he found means, through an accomplice, to abstract from the prosecution's files the key evidence against him, the forged 48,000 franc cheque. At the moment of his arrest he was being kept by another old lady, who was extremely generous to him.

His name continued to crop up in the ranks of the share-pushers and the confidence men. In 1926 charges of obtaining money by false pretences were brought against him simultaneously by the Banque Nationale de Crédit and the Banque Spéciale de Crédit. Proceedings had also been started against him by two stockbrokers, from whom he had stolen shares to a total value of eight million francs, equal in those days to £8,000.

He was finally arrested by officers from M. Pachot's department, but he escaped from the Law Courts as the examining magistrate was on the point of committing him for trial. A warrant was issued for his arrest and in July 1926 the police finally traced him and a gang of his friends to a suburban villa as they were on the point of fleeing to Switzer-

<sup>1</sup> A large number of shares, bearing numbers forged by Stavisky and his accomplices, were raffled on board the liners *Valdivia* and *Formosa* while sailing between Marseilles and Buenos Aires.



land with their booty. The car with its load of shares and papers was seized and Stavisky disappeared behind prison bars.

Sixteen months later, towards the end of 1927, he managed to get himself released on bail. The preliminary investigation of the series of charges against him had proved extraordinarily complex and was far from being completed. However, he was able to plead ill-health, and thenceforth prison was to see him no more.

He was soon either directly or indirectly involved in twenty-five or thirty commercial, financial or industrial companies, each more bogus than the last. The biggest of them, to start with, was the Alex Enterprises Company, to which he had given the diminutive of his christian name and of which he was the moving spirit. The ostensible business of this company was to deal in jewellery and curios, and its principal assets consisted of a stock of jewellery, valued at ten million francs, held in three shops, at Biarritz, Cannes and Le Touquet.

Since sales were not bringing in money fast enough, after a few months the jewellery was pledged at the Orléans municipal pawnshop. The size of the sums lent against it makes it more than probable that a stock of ~~fake~~ fake jewellery was also pledged. But the pledges were redeemed in time and no fraud was ever proved.

One reason why these operations had gone through so easily was that the co-founder of the Alex Company was a former sleeping partner in the Orléans municipal pawnshop. When the company needed more liquid capital, the pawnshop put its signature to bearer bonds which Stavisky discounted with the banks.

The money he obtained in this way served to cover the costs of a new share issue for the Public Works Enterprises Advance Company, with offices at 28 Place Saint Georges, Paris, and the flotation expenses of the Mechanical Farming Undertakings Company, of the same address, and of other

similar firms, none of which could show an honest balance sheet. As subscriptions for the shares came in, the most pressing of the existing debts could be settled. Thus it was thanks to a successful new issue of the Public Works Advance Company that Stavisky was able at the last moment to pay off his debts to the Orléans municipal pawnshop in full, just in time to stop proceedings being started against him.

His experience at Orléans had, however, taught him that there was easy money to be made out of pawnshops. He hunted round for another place where the same game could be played and finally hit on Bayonne. Bayonne had a wealthy colony of Spanish exiles, and it had no municipal pawnshop.

Once he was in with the cashier and the auditor of a municipal pawnshop, the operation was childishly simple: it would be just as easy at Bayonne as it had been at Orléans. The first step was the granting of a loan: the loan always exceeded the value of the pledge and the pledge was never deposited. Next came the issue of a bond on the security of the pledge, which was in fact no security at all, since the pledge was not there. Finally the bond itself was faked, entered on the stub at, say, a hundred thousand francs and discounted for the value of a million.

It would of course be equally simple for a detective who knew his business to put his finger on the fraud. Once he could lay his hands on a false million franc bond, he would only have to compare it with the stub, the object pledged and the pawn ticket issued to the depositor to have all the evidence he needed to start a prosecution. If the suspect could only be kept out of the way long enough for these checks to be carried out, nothing could save him from arrest and conviction.

The detective also had to know enough, however, to be sure of what questions to ask, or else to have a false bond in his possession. But the very simplicity of the fraud, the number of conscious or unconscious instruments who would be involved in the complicated administrative and account-

ancy machinery of the town, the department, and more than one Ministry in Paris, offered an almost impenetrable barrier to investigation.

Stavisky's name appeared but rarely on the boards of the various companies which he directed from the Place Saint Georges. He had taken the precaution to rope in as guinea-pig directors a host of eminent figures who served, often unconsciously, as lightning conductors or as window-dressing. Among them were former prefects, retired generals, diplomats, senior civil servants, magistrates, lawyers, dignitaries of the Legion of Honour. Stavisky counted on them when it came to putting over his publicity, getting the ear of the people who mattered, and exploiting tricks of legal procedure to the utmost, thanks to which he had the criminal proceedings against him adjourned nineteen successive times.

Just how such swindles as Stavisky's would be organized is explained in the memoirs of a former Prefect of Police, Louis Lepine:

'There is a classic recipe for making easy money. It is to form a limited company. The name does not matter, the objects may be purely imaginary, as long as the prospectus is full of promises. If the promoter can only command the services of a big enough army of touts, nothing can stop the suckers' money flooding in; publicity can convince suckers of anything and the man out for an easy fortune is always blind. The promoter begins, of course, by distributing a handsome dividend: that is merely his bait. As soon as the money gives out, he floats another company, using the same technique: the shares will be snapped up as eagerly as ever, and the fragile structure of confidence can be shored up that much longer. Then there is a third flotation, and so on *ad infinitum*. The business becomes a pyramid, with its foundations in the sand and its apex in the clouds. A crash is bound to come in the end, of course, but before that happens the promoter will be well out of it.

'For some time past my officers' reports had been full of the most extravagant stories about the crop of financial companies that were sprouting up like mushrooms almost every day. The stories were so wild that I had difficulty in believing them. To set my conscience at rest, however, I started an inquiry, and they put the figures before me. It looked as if two hundred million francs had been wheedled out of the nation's stockings.

'There was almost nothing about the companies' operations that would stand up to serious examination. That made me think. The financial papers were not saying a word: perhaps they had their reasons for that. But the Public Prosecutor's department, which knew much more of the business than I did from the flood of complaints it had received, was doing just as little. The reason was simple: it felt that if it took action it would be assuming a crushing responsibility. It would be launching a frontal attack on a financial empire which had the support of thousands of *bona fide* investors, and of the hardened speculators who were in it with them; there would certainly be a slump on the Bourse, perhaps a panic. These apprehensions were understandable, but the swindlers were continuing to suck in the small investors' savings, and something had to be done. I talked to my Minister personally more than once and tried to communicate my concern to him, but he only listened to me with half an ear. Obviously he was not interested; he thought it was nobody's business but the courts. And when I turned to the Public Prosecutor's department, I had no more success. It had been a long-standing principle of the department, as a circular had just recalled, not to take action over a swindle in which private citizens only were the victims unless someone laid formal information with the department. Informations may have been laid, but it had regarded them merely as complaints, and at the moment had none in its files.'

Though the passage quoted fitted the Stavisky affair like a glove, it refers in fact to the Rochette affair, in which, twenty

years earlier, small investors had been swindled out of two hundred million gold francs—two thousand million francs in Stavisky's time. The Prefect of Police had been extremely worried over the extravagant boom in the Rochette businesses, but he could not get either the Minister of the Interior or the judicial authorities to share his concern. The Minister insisted that the matter was one for the Public Prosecutor, and the Public Prosecutor said he was helpless till an information was laid with him. Finally a victim was found to lay an information and the crook was arrested. But the market value of the shares was kept up artificially so that their slump was a gradual one. Thus there was no panic selling to precipitate the final crash.

The examining magistrate conducted his investigations slowly and deliberately. Everything was done to delay the conviction of Rochette and the collapse of his soap-bubble empire. Despite all these precautions, the papers attacked the Prefect violently for having exceeded his powers and the Public Prosecutor and the examining magistrate for having acted over-hastily. Shareholders, financier, journalists and politicians came forward in shoals and asserted that Rochette would have been quite capable of refloating his companies on a sound basis and that his arrest was a piece of arbitrary interference. Finally a parliamentary commission was appointed in 1910 to inquire into the circumstances which had led the Prefect of Police to arrest Rochette.

In 1934 a parliamentary commission was appointed to ascertain why the Sûreté Générale had not arrested Stavisky. In this case, as in that of Rochette, it is probable that victims and protectors of the adventurer alike thought there was a reasonable hope of his turning the tables on misfortune, that by some miraculous trick of reconstruction Stavisky might have transferred his liabilities to other shoulders, if not covered them completely. And it is quite true that his final promotion, the Independent Bank of International Public Works, appeared to have a perfectly sound financial basis.

The bonds it proposed to issue were to be secured on the officially recognized claims to compensation of the Hungarian landowners whose lands had been transferred, under the Treaty of the Trianon, to proprietors who had opted for citizenship of the succession States of Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. There were enormous speculative possibilities in the operation, and Stavisky had been officially promised a share in the first block of claims, on which he had paid a considerable deposit.

Unhappily for him, echoes of his previous swindles continued to be heard in financial circles and ham-strung the efforts of the friends at court that he could still count on. When the Finance Ministry and the Foreign Ministry learned from the *Sûreté Générale* of the record of Serge Alexandre, they officially declared themselves against his participation. The new promotion was still-born, and its failure was to lead indirectly to the final and sensational crash of the card-castle of Stavisky's financial empire.

Looking back on the story, one cannot fail to be staggered by the fact that the innumerable and explicit warnings given by the press, and even by the police, right up to the eve of the scandal were completely without effect. They were given to the Ministries of Commerce, of Finance, and of the Interior, to the concerns which held Bayonne municipal pawnshop bonds, and to the legal authorities, but no one paid the least attention. Scarcely less surprising is the fact that not a single one of the prominent figures who appeared on the boards of the various Stavisky companies had the shrewdness to see through his fraudulent activities or the courage to denounce them.

The total money lost through the discovery of the Bayonne frauds has been estimated at 500 million francs. Since the bonds were issued in denominations of from 50,000 to 3,000,000 francs, there must have been some hundreds of holders, including a high proportion of representatives of corporate bodies, such as banks and insurance companies,

who are usually pretty wide-awake. It is almost unbelievable that the rumours that were going round and the digs at Stavisky which had appeared in the papers did not arouse the suspicion of banking and stockbroking circles earlier, at least to the extent of their pressing for an audit. For it would have sufficed for one man to go and see a superintendent of police for Stavisky's swindles to have been stopped long before the sensational onset of the scandal. Apart, however, from the officers of the Préfecture of Police and the Sûreté Générale and a handful of private citizens, who were doing their best to drag the truth to light, it looked as if everyone was determined to keep it quiet.

What finally forced it out was that Stavisky, who was at the end of his resources, could not find the 2,200,000 francs necessary to meet four Bayonne bonds which had been discounted by an insurance company. Pleading a temporary shortage of cash, he had got the Bayonne court to grant him time to pay, but the insurance company did not abandon its proceedings. Just about the same time, on 21 September 1933, the head of the General Intelligence department at the Ministry of the Interior was laying before the Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale the following minute, prepared by Superintendent Décaudin :

"There is renewed talk in banking circles of a scandal which is supposed to be about to break in connection with the bonds of the Bayonne municipal pawnshop, in which the well-known swindler Stavisky, backer of the paper *La Volonté*, is mixed up. The paper *Commentaires* also alludes to it in its issue of the 17th inst. in an article headed "Disturbing Coincidences".

"Stavisky, in collaboration with a certain Cohen, a former jeweller, is said two or three years ago to have been lending money on the security of jewellery without giving the borrowers any cover; later, thanks to the contacts he had with the Bayonne municipal pawnshop, he is said to have pledged the jewellery there in order to obtain money. Since

the Bayonne pawnshop could not find the large sums Stavisky wanted, it agreed to the proposal he put up. Under this bonds were issued under the guarantee of the pawnshop, which Stavisky then undertook to discount with banks and insurance companies. In banking circles it is asserted that the Bayonne municipal pawnshop has issued more than 100,000,000 francs worth of these bonds, which bear the signature of M. Garat, the Deputy and Mayor of the town and which are said to be in the portfolios of certain insurance companies, particularly the Séquanaise and the Providence.

'Most of the bonds having now fallen due for redemption, Stavisky is said to be seeking to renew them, but to have been refused by the insurance companies, who are insisting on cash. It is also stated that the original borrowers, who want their pledges back, have been unsuccessfully demanding their jewellery, which is now in the hands of the Bayonne municipal pawnshop.

'It is said that proceedings are about to be started, and it is believed in financial circles that certain left-wing deputies among Stavisky's contacts may be compromised.

'It may be recalled that Stavisky carried out a similar operation in 1929 at the Orléans municipal pawnshop; this resulted in proceedings as a result of which Stavisky is said to have repaid part of the sums advanced by it.'

A few days later, another minute reported that an attempt had been made at a Geneva bank to negotiate at a discount a Bayonne bond of a face value of three million francs.

This, then was what had been happening. It was the explanation of Stavisky's lavish spending, of his high play at the tables, of the criminal audacity of his financial speculations.

In 1932, as head of the Sûreté Criminal Investigation department, I had referred to the possibility of a political scandal breaking in connection with Stavisky; I had added that I was powerless to take action for lack of adequate information. Now here was the head of the General Intelligence depart-



ment reporting in detail on the same scandal to our common chief, the Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale, and giving exactly the information I had wanted. The Commissioner had thus at his disposal complete files on the crook from our two departments. All he had to do was to get the two departmental heads together and work out with them the best way of taking action. Probably the best way would have been to put the Criminal Investigation department on the job.

Unfortunately the Criminal Investigation department at the Sûreté, as at the Préfecture of Police, is known for its embarrassing habit of going out after its man and letting nothing stop it. This was going to be a delicate affair, and they would put their huge hobnailed boots in it and kick up all sorts of dirt. That was not the way the Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale, the right hand man of the Minister of the Interior in everything concerning the police of France, wanted to see the Stavisky case handled. It may well be that it had not even occurred to him to think of it in terms of an arrest. He was essentially an administrator, and he did not know or did not want to know about that side of his department's activities. So he confined himself to asking the Prefect of the Basses Pyrénées department to carry out a quiet supplementary investigation.

The Prefect of the Basses Pyrénées was even more embarrassed than the Commissioner of the Sûreté. On the recommendation of the deputy and mayor of Bayonne he had just authorized the issue by the municipal pawnshop of bonds worth several million more francs. He did not reply to the request for an investigation. Instead he came up to see the Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale and asked him whether or not he ought to inform the deputy and mayor of Bayonne of Stavisky's past. In fact, he need not have worried about this. M. Garat had been warned long before about Stavisky by his local police superintendent and had paid no attention at all to the warning.

The Commissioner, however, took the Prefect quite seri-

ously. He thought he should see M. Garat and acquaint him with the serious allegations just made against Stavisky, and also notify the Ministry of Commerce, which is responsible for the supervision of municipal pawnshops. Commenting later on this performance, M. Georges Mandel expressed the view that in the circumstances M. Thomé had 'shown a lack of backbone'.

Be that as it may, as the Commissioner saw it, the danger of a crash had been averted for the moment and the case had been switched on to a siding. In the laudable desire to postpone the breaking of the scandal he had in fact made certain that the scandal would break almost at once and that it would be far bigger.

The proceedings started by the insurance company were taking their course. The numbers and face values of the bonds whose redemption it was claiming were in the brief. In December 1933, the Bayonne Collector of Taxes, who had been ordered to check them, went to the municipal pawnshop. He had only to compare the figures on the bonds with those on the counterfoils to see that a swindle had been committed. The manager and accountant, Tissier, who was an accomplice of Stavisky, began by refusing to answer any questions, and the Collector of Taxes had no power to make him talk. The next morning, however, Saturday, 23 December, he presented himself at the sub-préfecture and made a full confession, and confirmed the facts when he was brought before the Public Prosecutor. Proceedings were started, and Tissier was arrested.

In the meantime, however, he had given the alarm to his associates in Paris. At the same moment as the gates of Bayonne prison were shutting on Tissier, his chief, Stavisky, was leaving his home in Paris, the Hotel Claridge, for the last time.

Of the series of investigations, consultations and representations, of the attempts to sidetrack the facts and to check on them, which preceded the breaking of the scandal

in 1933, the Criminal Investigation departments of the Sûreté Générale and the Préfecture of Police had been told absolutely nothing. Nor, for that matter, had the departments concerned at the Ministry of Commerce.

A high official of the Ministry of Commerce, M. Léon Delamarche, brought out at the time, under the title, *Who let Stavisky get away with it?* a pamphlet intended to clear his officials of blame. In it occurs the following passage:

'Neither the Cousin report of 21 May, 1931, nor the Pachot report<sup>1</sup> of October 1931, which called for an audit of the books of the Bayonne municipal pawnshop, were brought in any form whatsoever to the notice of the Ministry of Commerce. Nor were the proceedings initiated on 20 January 1933 by the Paris Public Prosecutor's department in connection with the offer by certain shady firms of bonds of the Bayonne pawnshop which were stated to be forgeries—proceedings which were closed on 3 March 1933 when M. Pressard, the Public Prosecutor, called for the dismissal of the case. The Ministry was never informed either of the Cousin report of 25 September 1933, which recommended an investigation by the Inspectorate-General of Finance, nor of any of the numerous reports of the Criminal Investigation departments of the Sûreté Générale and the Préfecture of Police, which had been doing their best for three years to expose Stavisky.'

This quotation revealed for the first time that legal proceedings had been taken in this matter by the Paris Public Prosecutor, and had ended in the case being dismissed.

Short of breaking down our superiors' doors and making a first-class scene, what could we do in face of this universal

<sup>1</sup> Before the Stavisky affair came to light, M. Pachot, head of the financial department of the Préfecture of Police, and his colleague M. Cousin, had made periodic reports, starting in 1930, on Stavisky's activities. Had these reports been acted upon, it is probable that they would have put an end to his career.

attitude of obstruction, a mere divisional superintendent at the Préfecture of Police, whose chiefs 'wanted nothing more than to see his back', and a Chief Inspector of the Sûreté who had been refused the right to bar the gaming rooms to a convicted criminal?

For all that, the officials of the Ministry of Commerce, and the officers of the two police services, who had been carefully kept in the dark to the very end, were the first to take the rap when the great hunt for a scapegoat began.

December 23, 1933, the day when the fact of the bond forgeries was officially established, when the cashier of the Bayonne pawnshop was arrested and when Stavisky took flight, the day that marked at long last the start of proceedings in the case, was a Saturday. Sunday the 24th and Monday the 25th, Christmas Day, went by without a single intimation of the new development reaching either the administrative or legal authorities of the police departments concerned with the case. The swindler had thus a three days' start on the officers who were soon to be hunting him.

Moreover, the evening of the same Saturday saw an appalling railway disaster that swamped the front pages of every paper in the country. An express train, running at sixty miles an hour in thick fog, collided with a Paris suburban train just outside Lagny-sur-Marne station. Two hundred and ten passengers were killed and the Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were taken up by the identification and funerals of the victims, for which every available police officer was called in.

But the story of the disaster was soon to be swept off the front pages by the story of Stavisky's flight and of the nation-wide hunt for him. On Wednesday, 27 December, five days after the first discoveries, the Sûreté Générale received through the post a rogatory commission from the examining magistrate at Bayonne. The magistrate ordered the blocking of any bank accounts Tissier might have and asked for whatever information the financial department of

the Paris Public Prosecutor's office might possess on the background of a certain Serge Alexandre. The Criminal Investigation department of the Sûreté immediately got on the telephone. It told the Bayonne magistrate that Serge Alexandre was none other than Stavisky, a convicted criminal in flight from justice, and asked for a warrant for his arrest.

The warrant reached Paris on 28 December. It was immediately relayed by telegraph and radio to every Criminal Investigation squad in the country for repetition throughout their various districts. It was also wired to the police superintendents at all the ports, airports and frontier posts in the country, and to the European police forces affiliated to the International Police Commission. It was made clear that if the wanted man was discovered, his extradition would be asked for.

On the same day investigations were started at insurance companies and banks all over France to ascertain the number of bonds of the Bayonne municipal pawnshop that were in circulation and to discover how they had been placed. Searches were also carried out at the offices in the Place Saint Georges of the various companies founded by Stavisky and at the homes of most of his directors and associates. Finally watchers were posted outside the block of flats where Stavisky's wife, under a false name, had sought refuge with her two children.

No less than twenty superintendents and inspectors of the Criminal Investigation department, every man available, were put on round-the-clock duty to press the various investigations and to co-operate in the hunt for the wanted man. As long as the legal investigation continued at Bayonne, they had to carry this enormous responsibility unaided. For all their enthusiasm, however, the distance that separated them from the examining magistrate, their ignorance of the first facts in the case, the uncertainty of trunk telephone calls and the absolute necessity of complying with legal formalities slowed down their work dangerously

It should be explained that a recently-voted Act had made it impossible for superintendents and inspectors of the Criminal Investigation department to carry out searches except in the presence of a magistrate. Every time that a search was needed, it had to wait till a magistrate was available. In the circumstances the law worked in favour of the criminal rather than the police officer, and the respect of legal formalities ate up minute after precious minute.

The officers working on the case were soon overwhelmed by a flood of statements from the public, reporting Stavisky's presence from every point of the compass. He had been seen with a journalist, with a lawyer, with a cinema star. People had seen him at Havre and at Grenoble, at the Spanish frontier, on the Riviera and in the Tyrol. Every report had to be checked, and even the wildest clues were followed up; then on Sunday, 7 January a faint light of hope appeared.

Just before the New Year, a lady who had been taking a mountain-air cure at Servoz, in Haute-Savoie, was preparing to return to Paris with her children. She was on the point of leaving when a neighbour who sometimes made his house available for holiday camps came and asked her whether she would be prepared to let her chalet to a sick friend who needed a rest in the mountains. The neighbour explained that his own house was no use owing to trouble with the heating apparatus.

The lady took him at his word and agreed. She lent her villa rent-free to her neighbour, whom she had known for some years, handed him the keys and gave the necessary orders to the gardener, who was staying on. Then she took the train for Paris.

In the course of the journey, she lost her suitcase. She asked her father, a retired senior official of the Ministry of the Interior, to go and inquire for it at the Sûreté Générale, which is responsible for the policing of the railways. Her father was also mayor of a little place in the Saône-et-Loire department, which happened to be the home of the family of

the Chief Inspector of the Criminal Investigation department. So when it came to making his inquiry, it was to his fellow-citizen that he went.

The Chief Inspector told the Superintendent at the Gare de Lyon to make the usual inquiries, and as chance would have it the suitcase was discovered almost intact in a goods wagon in a siding. When the mayor was asked on 5 January 1934 to identify the missing luggage, he said that since his daughter had come back to Paris she had been struck by the newspaper reports about the activities and the flight of a crook named Stavisky. She had just got a letter from her gardener in Savoy about the curious behaviour of her last-moment tenant and of the two men who were with him, of whom one seemed to be a servant. He had a hunch that there might be some connection.

The unusual lodger seemed to be extremely anxious not to show himself to anyone. He never left his room, and when his two friends were out, he confined himself to passing notes under the door to ask for what he wanted. He lived on milk and sent out for all the Paris papers as soon as they appeared. But he did not take them from outside his door till he was certain there was no one there to see him.

The report was only one among a hundred, all equally sensational, but it made the Chief Inspector think. Before he had time to worry about it too much, however, he received a telephone call summoning him to the law courts. On the way to his garage, he ran into a superintendent whom he knew and asked him whether he was tied up with any work for the moment: it was Superintendent Charpentier, whose professional record he had long respected. Charpentier had nothing urgent on hand, and to save time he jumped into the car beside his chief, who, on the way down from the Sûreté to the law courts, repeated the story he had just heard.

The facts might mean nothing, he said, but they were worth checking. Charpentier was ready to leave the same

night for Savoy. Before he left he would go and see the owner of the chalet, so that he could read the gardener's letter and get any other information that might be useful. Investigations had already revealed that Stavisky had been accompanied in his flight by a certain Voix, who was known to the police, and who had been employed as a receptionist at the Place Saint Georges offices and had occasionally acted as Stavisky's valet. Perhaps it was he who was waiting on his master in Savoy. The superintendent would therefore get hold of his anthropometrical photograph, with a number of others, and take it down with him. If the story proved to be a false alarm, Charpentier would be back in Paris within forty-eight hours.

The inspector who was driving the car had heard the conversation from the front seat. He came from Savoy and knew the Servoz district inside out. What was more, his brother-in-law ran a garage not far away and, if it were necessary, could let them have a car fitted for mountain driving. He volunteered to go on the job, and was accepted; before Charpentier left he picked a second inspector to accompany him.

The next morning, Sunday, 7 January, Charpentier telephoned the Sûreté to say that the trail was almost certainly the right one. The two men who were with the occupant of the villa had been identified. One of them was the neighbour of the lady who had lent the chalet, and who had stayed on behind. He held a post on the managerial side of a Paris paper which Stavisky had been backing. The second man was none other than the receptionist-valet of the Place Saint Georges. Everything went to suggest that the man who was hiding was Stavisky himself.

Unfortunately when Charpentier arrived at Servoz, the three men had already been gone three days. The superintendent discovered, however, that their luggage had been sent off by sledge in the direction of Chamonix, and he set off there at once. Naturally in January winter sports resorts



are crowded, but an examination at the gendarmerie of registration forms of hotels, pensions and furnished lettings pointed to one group among the latest arrivals who might be interesting: a party of two or three tourists, including one woman, who had rented for a few days a villa belonging to M. Chatou, a former mayor of Chamonix. The names were certainly not those of the wanted men, but the dates and places of birth presented certain similarities. When M. Chatou was approached, he said he had not had his keys back yet, so his tenants must still be in the house, and he went there with Charpentier and the two inspectors. There was no sign of life in the place, and except that a thin plume of smoke was coming from one of the chimneys, it seemed deserted.

M. Chatou entered his chalet, followed by the superintendent, as if he were showing the place to a prospective tenant. The two men went into all the rooms, till they came to the door of one which was locked. It was the door of the room from which smoke was coming out of the chimney.

They knocked but there was no answer, so they pretended to go away. Charpentier, however, immediately returned on tiptoe and listened for any sound that might indicate that there was someone in the room. He heard nothing, so he left as quietly as he had approached and went to a neighbouring house to telephone to Paris.

His problem was not a simple one. There might be nobody in M. Chatou's house. The key of the room was not in the lock, and the door might have been locked from the outside before the tenants left. Even if there was anyone there, it was not certain that it was the wanted man: it might easily be a couple of lovers taking advantage of the house being empty. Information had reached the Ministry of the Interior in Paris that the fugitive might be hiding anywhere within a twenty-mile radius round Chamonix, and if that were true, he would be likely to try to get near the frontier, so every moment spent in Chamonix itself might be a moment wasted.

But that was not all. News of the Sûreté expedition had leaked out. Reporters from all the big newspapers were pouring into Chamonix and left Charpentier no hope of working on his own and in peace. There could be no question of his leaving Chamonix before he had solved the riddle. On the other hand, the house was isolated in the snow so there could be no question now of keeping it indefinitely under observation, especially as the wanted man, if he was there, must already be aware that he had been tracked down. Time was pressing, and the superintendent had to make up his mind.

In his official reports and in his statements to the examining magistrate and to the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, Charpentier was to tell again and again, with hardly a phrase changed, his story of the climax of the affair: how, after he had tried everything else, he had finally decided to knock on the locked door and summon the occupant, if there was one, to come out. He also recounted, down to the smallest detail, how he had heard a shot inside and had broken a window in order to get into the room, the door of which was still locked. Finally he described the position in which he found Stavisky in his death-throes on the floor with a revolver within reach of his hand.

Four witnesses had been with him at the fatal moment: the owner of the chalet, M. Chatou, a gendarme from the Chamonix force and the two inspectors. They confirmed, minute by minute, his story of the order of events. Neither the doctor, who arrived soon after, nor two surgeons who tried to save the wounded man, expressed the least doubt about the suicide; nor for that matter did the Public Prosecutor from Bonneville or the examining magistrate, who were summoned immediately to open the inquiry. The circumstances of the drama were perfectly simple and irrefutably clear.

But even if it had taken place before the eyes of twenty witnesses, even if the facts had been a hundred times clearer, that would not have prevented the press from raising the cry

of a new police crime, whether they followed *L'Action Française* in describing it as premeditated murder or dismissed it as a mere piece of flat-footedness.

The theory was given the lie as soon as the facts were seriously investigated, but it left an impression on the man in the street, and even among the members of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, that when all was said and done perhaps it would have been too dangerous to arrest Stavisky alive.

In fact Stavisky, deserted by his accomplices, whose main idea now was to strip him of his last resources before they betrayed him, and with the police on his trail for a fortnight, had made up his mind to die. He had written as much in a letter of farewell to his wife and children that was found on his table. In the little room where he had shut himself up, behind the thick walls that stood between him and his pursuers, he had come to the end of his tether and he was holding a revolver in his hand. Nobody in the world, in that final moment, could have prevented him pulling the trigger.

However that may be, the moment the news was flashed out, the tragic death of the swindler made the front pages of newspapers throughout the world. In France, nothing counted but the Stavisky affair and the underhand intrigues that it was to start in all sorts of places. The 210 victims of the Lagny disaster, barely a week in their graves, were relegated to oblivion.

For ten years, it had been impossible to accuse the *Bûreté Générale* of killing a soul, and the subject had become a little stale. Now, in the nick of time, a new corpse was at the disposal of the specialists of political blackmail. And it was only the beginning.

The scandals that had been accumulating round the name of Stavisky and the secret activities of an opposition to the régime that had yet to find a focussing point had been simmering in the shadows for a long time. With the death of the crook, both came to the boil together.

In the second fortnight of January the language of the newspapers grew daily more violent. Their systematic and often quite unjustified hostility towards anyone remotely involved in the case drove more than one of the victims off his head. An assistant tried to take poison in the chambers of the Public Prosecutor. An Official of the Ministry of Agriculture cut his throat in Fontainebleau forest. A well-known lawyer jumped into the Seine and was only saved in the nick of time. The Public Prosecutor, who was a sick man, could not stand up to it and died suddenly with the proceedings barely opened.

But the most desperate of all the figures in the story was Judge Prince, former head of the financial department of the Public Prosecutor's office. The responsibilities that lay on his shoulders were heavy the day he left Paris on family business. The next day, 20 February 1934, his mangled body was found on the railway line not far from Dijon.

Detectives who investigated his death and the earliest witnesses on the spot were unanimous that the setting of the scene pointed to only one conclusion. 'The dead man had been kneeling between the rails, facing in the direction in which the trains ran, and he had been hit in the back of the head by the engine of an express. Traces were later found on the front of the locomotive. A knife and other personal belongings scattered over the permanent way helped to cast an air of mystery round the tragedy that might have been carefully worked out. The whole behaviour of the judge in his last twenty-four hours, all the evidence gathered on the spot, every particle of information gleaned in the searching investigation of the affair pointed to suicide as a certainty. Unfortunately, as a journalist put it at the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, 'You can't sell a suicide'.

It may be difficult to sell a suicide, but a murder sells like hot cakes, and the death of Judge Prince sparked off a babel of the wildest accusations. The most popular version saw the culprit in M. Camille Chautemps, who was Premier and

Minister of the Interior at the time of Stavisky's death. M. Chautemps, so the story went, having got his hand in over Stavisky, had Prince executed either by his police or by a nark. The object was to shield the Public Prosecutor, M. Pressard, who happened to be M. Chautemps's brother-in-law, against disclosures that were threatening him, and Pressard was of course an accomplice.

The hue and cry had started. The legal authorities themselves followed the nationalist press for a brief while on the scent of the mythical crime, and they actually found evidence for it. The first piece they found was a statement volunteered by a clairvoyant of the Toulouse area. The next piece was provided by a country cleric who was a diviner, and who by swinging a pendulum over a photograph of Judge Prince was able to say how many murderers had been involved and to provide a complete description of them. More grist was brought to the mill by witnesses who claimed second sight here or an intuition there and whose evidence was conscientiously noted, though a fair proportion of them were plain cranks. The final contribution came from the perspicacious Inspector Bonny, promoted by the press to the dignity of 'France's No. 1 detective', who took no time at all to pin the crime on three minor characters of the Marseilles underworld.

One after the other, however, all these successive scents petered out. Even the miracle man from Scotland Yard who had been called to the rescue had to return to London with his tail between his legs. The moment came when a proper investigation had to be started, and Divisional Superintendent Guillaume, of the Préfecture of Police, was put in charge of it.

No one could doubt his professional competence, his impartiality or the soundness of his judgment, and here is what he had to say in his final report:

'Upwards of five hundred inquiries were ~~carried~~ carried out, in Paris and in the provinces, as the result of signed or anony-

mous statements, in addition to the innumerable check-ups and shadowing that these inquiries called for. One witness's statement alone (that the murderers had used a Hotchkiss car to carry out the crime) necessitated 850 check-ups with owners of Hotchkiss cars. There still remain [in August 1934] nearly 2,000 inquiries to be made of persons who were released from prison before 20 February or committed after that date. None of these trails has yielded the least appreciable result.'

Superintendent Guillaume's report adduces disquieting presumptions about other aspects of the case. Here, however, it will be sufficient to quote the conclusions of the Parliamentary Commission on the accusation of murder that ought never to have been made:

'In view of the results of the magistrate's inquiry, which has shown the baselessness of all these accusations, the Commission would like to emphasize that nothing remains either of the charges or the insinuations against M. Pressard and M. Camille Chautemps, and that their names ought never to have been dragged into the affair.'

If the Guillaume report brings out beyond argument the circumstances of Judge Prince's suicide, Superintendent Pachot's statements leave no doubt at all about the circumstances that led him to take his life.

Time and again in his last four years, packed as they were with fraudulent activities, Stavisky had laid himself open to arrest. If he was never arrested, the reason is simple. Using legal quibbles as a cloak, powerful friends who could not be resisted intervened again and again to brake, paralyse and finally bring to a standstill the legal authorities' action.

The obstructive attitude of Judge Prince has rightly been regarded as one of the decisive elements in the scandal. 'After Stavisky was released on bail in 1928,' Superintendent Pachot writes, 'I asked him in to see me and I said to him: "You have been asked to leave Paris. You were released on the grounds of your health. You don't seem to have left Paris,

because I found you still here. I know what you are going to do here, so I warn you that whatever happens and whoever the influential friends are that you boast about, I shall keep on after you till I get you, and you'll find I'm as good as my word." He looked at me in a mocking sort of way,' Pachot adds, 'then shrugged his shoulders and left'.

Pachot was as good as his word. In March 1930, he handed to Judge Prince, then head of the financial department of the Public Prosecutor's office, a report by Inspector Gripois. The report pointed to the striking similarities between the series of swindles carried out by Stavisky under cover of the Mechanical Farming Undertakings Company and the serious frauds committed in the more recent flotation of the Public Works Enterprises Advance Company, which was just issuing 100 million francs' worth of new stock.

The hearing of the first case was still pending before the Thirteenth Correctional Court, which had granted Stavisky bail, and Pachot now asked that this bail should be revoked.

Judge Prince did not reply to this proposal till 18 October. He did so in a painstaking report on the Advance Company which was stuffed with legal precedents but which did not refer once to the fictitious subscriptions he had been told about, or to the fact that Stavisky was behind the board, or to the case still pending before the Thirteenth Court. Thus M. Pachot never got the instructions he had asked for, and the Public Prosecutor, whom Judge Prince should have consulted about the affair, said later that he had never even heard of the Gripois or the Pachot reports.

The pigeon-holing of the Pachot report gave Stavisky a breathing space. With the help of the money he got through the Advance Company he plugged the holes in the Orléans municipal pawnshop. His next step was to use the experience he had gained there to start up the same business at Bayonne. He had gained more than a year.

In 1931, the Tours Public Prosecutor's office asked for information on a certain Alexandre, who was the plaintiff in a

commercial case and who seemed to them to be a dubious character. Inspector Cousin knew the subject inside out, and M. Pachot detailed him to write the necessary report. Inspector Cousin recalled Stavisky's past history, mentioned the affairs of the Advance Company and the Orléans municipal pawnshop and referred to the possibility of a new swindle at Bayonne. His report was forwarded to Tours, and as it seemed an excellent opportunity to give a prod to the financial department of the Paris Public Prosecutor's office, M. Pachot had a copy sent also to Judge Prince for the necessary action.

M. Bruzin, one of Judge Prince's successors in the financial department, later explained why the department had marked time over the Public Works Enterprises Advance Company, which Inspector Cousin had mentioned in his report. It was not merely a question of charging one man, he said, but a whole board of directors with some important people on it. In order to get at Stavisky himself it would have been necessary to drag in seven or eight people behind whom he was hiding, which explained why the Public Prosecutor had to tread warily.

This explanation shed a flood of light on the story. It also shows the astuteness of the crook's defensive tactics, and the simple-mindedness—or the dishonesty—of the men who allowed themselves to work with him. In this particular case, the law's delays took the form of a note from Judge Prince to the Criminal Investigation department, in which he asked for a check-up on the position of a certain Cachard, a member of the board of directors, and also inquired whether it was true that Alexandre was Stavisky.

The information that the note asked for had already been provided half a dozen times or more in the Pachot, Gripois and Cousin reports and in all the other reports that had been laid before the financial department over the past years.

M. Pachot had asked for instructions with a view to making an arrest. The answer he got was far from what he



had expected. Coming as it did at the end of June, on the eve of the legal vacation which would slow down the activities of every department, he took it as a new attempt to sidetrack the affair. He was not only astounded, he was shocked. Since the sole contact he had was with Judge Prince, he could only imagine he was responsible, and coming out of the Judge's chambers he exploded with indignation. 'It's unbelievable,' he said, 'they're making monkeys of us. It's enough to make you believe that this fellow's in the racket too.'

In fact, of course, Judge Prince was not 'in the racket', any more than M. Pressard, the Public Prosecutor, or M. Thomé, the Commissioner, or M. Mireur, the Prefect, or any of the high officials and magistrates who had unreflectingly stood in the way of stronger action. Superintendent Pachot knew that as well as anyone. But behind and above these officials, there were men who *were* in the racket. It was they who had intervened in Stavisky's favour at every level of the civil service and the judiciary. It was they who had sold him their names and their political prestige. However much it revolted him, Judge Prince could not say 'no' when they brought their influence to bear, and it was their misdoings he expiated when he took his life.

The confidence that many people persisted in showing Stavisky for years, despite his murky past, reveals a curious state of mind. In the eyes of the plain professional policeman, the man had been classified once and for all. As they saw it, you did not have to scratch the showy surface of this plausible gentleman very hard to find a common scoundrel, a cheat, a thief, a forger, a swindler and, when he needed to be, a ponce. But there was a certain class of politicians and lawyers, of civil servants and journalists who looked on him as a daring financier, a master of legal procedure and, in the charming phrase of the Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale, 'a brilliant tight-rope walker'.

The real master criminals, the upper crust of crime,

whether they deal in shares or dope, in official secrets or white slaves, often exercise a fascination over famous people that a plain policeman cannot hope to emulate. For those who pride themselves on their open-mindedness, the big-time gangster is a shrewd if a tough specimen of humanity whose acquaintance one can afford to cultivate once he has hit the front page, and so it becomes possible to meet in a Minister's ante-room people who could not look a policeman in the face.

Tolerance of this kind is a cheap way of winning a reputation as a man of the world. But it is a distorted view and its consequences are all the more serious when it is found high up in the administrative hierarchy, which brings to my mind a passage of the evidence I gave before the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry. I had been bombarded with questions as to why, two or three years earlier, I had not taken action when I saw the Préfecture of Police reports which described Stavisky's suspicious activities at Orléans and hinted at his intentions in Bayonne. The painstaking inquiry carried out in 1931 on the running of the Orléans municipal pawnshop, as I have already said, yielded no results. The audits which were later carried out periodically at Bayonne seemed to show that the accounts were in perfect order. Finally, all the formalities prescribed for the issue of bonds—and which should have prevented any fraud—had been fulfilled to the letter.

I had replied that in such circumstances the police could not take action on their own responsibility, unless someone had laid an information, or unless the established facts were equivalent to having caught the criminal in the act, or unless there was extremely strong circumstantial evidence, for an arrest and a committal to prison were two quite different things. In any case, the few officers I had at my disposal could not keep a day-to-day watch on the fifty people at least whom I knew, in Paris alone, to be even more dangerous than Stavisk;

My words were greeted with dead silence. As I left the Commission I felt pretty sure that I would soon have to give my grounds for such a forthright assertion, and I rapidly compiled from memory a list of twenty names, which I had no difficulty in bringing up to fifty when I consulted my files. But I need not have worried. No one in authority ever asked me who were the fifty master criminals who were moving freely about Paris on the look-out for the next big job. This unwillingness to press the point obviously meant that the members of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, which included more than one eminent lawyer, saw my point. It meant that the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Justice agreed too.

Agreed, that is to say, that it is no part of the duties of a criminal police force, whose powers and means are severely limited, to keep a permanent watch on every suspected criminal, and also that respect for the liberty of the individual requires that even if it is known as a fact that someone is a criminal, he shall not be arrested without proof.

In the case of Stavisky, all the legal proofs that were needed of his criminal activities had been within Superintendent Pachot's reach for a long time. But he could not lay his hands on them without a warrant, and no one would give him one.

The job he had not been allowed to do in the course of his duties, and which could only lead to the discovery of the Bayonne frauds, had thus been carried out with the greatest of ease by an official of the Ministry of Finance in the course of an ordinary administrative check-up.

Parliament had not yet, of course, got round to restricting the powers of auditors, as it had recently done with police superintendents: probably it had thought they were not important enough. And it had never occurred to the auditor to take a police officer along with him on his check-up. Right up to the moment of his flight, the swindler had benefited to the limit from the protection of the law.

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## At the Crossroads

BETWEEN 1931 and 1933, at the time when the Bayonne affair was in full swing, Stavisky signed advertisement contracts with several daily papers. He also controlled three or four little reviews, nominally devoted to 'comments of the week'—a delicate euphemism—intended to forestall possible adverse comment.

A great part of the press had benefited by the swindler's generosity and therefore hesitated to let itself go in the first days of the scandal, but Stavisky's death relieved a number of editors of a great burden and all the newspapers indulged in a furious onslaught against the police, the magistrates and the government.

Doubtless it would have been possible to trace some of the payments that were made and the discovery of certain letters would certainly have embarrassed many people, but the most authoritative witness was no longer there and it was always possible to dispute the accuracy of a note or a figure.

The ordinary investor had, indeed, only been very slightly involved in the affair, since the greater part of the false bonds had been taken up by banks and insurance companies. But if the latter had been involved so deeply, it was known that this was on the written recommendation of the Minister of Labour.

Though the whole of the press did not join in, it was completely at one in attacking the police, and public opinion was roused to such an extent that a left-wing paper, *Le Populaire*, though little prone as a rule to such errors of judgment, wrote on 10 January 1934:

'No, there can no longer be any doubt; M. Stavisky was shot down in cold blood by men under orders to do so. Shot down at point-blank range despite his entreaties.'

In this deafening chorus of abuse, *L'Action Française* was, needless to say, not behindhand. It had, however, never known a thing or whispered a word of the scandal before the death of Stavisky. It had paid no heed to the campaigns in the financial papers, which it followed closely. Its listening posts, which were still in operation in 1933, had yielded nothing, nor had the accusations made by *La Bonne Guerre*, Sartori's paper, with which it was perpetually at daggers drawn.

Such ignorance was more than extraordinary. What could explain this remarkable silence up to 10 January by people usually so well informed and so well equipped for fishing in troubled waters? Could it be that they, like the others, had been cashing in on the quiet?

Sartori said as much in *La Bonne Guerre* and pointed out that Stavisky had signed an advertisement contract with *L'Action Française* for 150,000 francs. Why not? Surely Stavisky's money was worth just as much in the royal coffers as that of Oxo cubes? Sartori also pointed out that Léon Daudet himself, shortly before the disaster, had dined with Stavisky and one of his friends, an important official, at a large hotel in the Place Vendôme.

*L'Action Française* went to the trouble of publishing an indignant denial in the *Echo de Paris* over the signature of Maurice Pujo, which *La Bonne Guerre* reproduced on 11 November 1934:

'Although the public could hardly take seriously such twaddle as this, which in any case has been given the lie direct by the facts, I should be grateful if you would take note of our statement that there is not a word of truth in this rumour.'

Let us note this denial for what it is worth. The accusation was none the less brought before the Commission of Inquiry.

The attitude of the French press as a whole, and that of the Royalist newspaper in particular, was to have a considerable influence on the course of events from January 1934 onward. Forty-eight hours after Stavisky's suicide, its tone had already risen alarmingly. Public opinion was roused and the first rumblings of the storm could be heard.

On 11 January two motions were tabled in the Chamber of Deputies. One, signed by fifteen members, sought to establish the causes of, and the responsibility for, the terrible catastrophe at Lagny. The other, which was in the names of eleven deputies, asked for all available information on the Stavisky affair and more especially on the affairs of the municipal pawnshop at Bayonne.

On the Lagny disaster, several members wanted to protest against the arbitrary arrest of the engine-driver and fireman of the Paris-Strasbourg express, who were mere puppets in the matter. But discussion of this was postponed because of the growing public uneasiness, and the motion calling for information on the Stavisky affair was given priority.

To forestall his opponents, the Prime Minister started to cut his losses. He asked the Minister of Labour to resign. Then, in an official statement, he announced that he would take action against the magistrates concerned, punish the guilty officials and inaugurate a drastic reform of the police.

One of the first speakers played straight into his hands:

'You have taken up a position towards a member of your cabinet which I will not say amounts to a demand that he should resign but has at least allowed him to resign of his own accord. You have dissociated yourself from him. Why? Because you felt that his responsibility was seriously compromised by the two letters which he had written, and which the Bayonne municipal pawnshop was able to use. You said to him: "I do not doubt your good faith; but you are right when you think that your presence in the government might embarrass me when I face the Chamber."

'Will not your attitude towards this Minister set the pattern for your attitude towards the heads of the judiciary, of the Sûreté Générale and the Préfecture of Police? Do you not think that it is at the top that one must strike? You saw that public opinion reacted with indignation in the Lagny affair, when an examining magistrate had the engine-driver and fireman arrested.

'The sanctions you have promised must not be allowed to strike the junior ranks only and spare those at the top.'

The way seemed clear, and the Prime Minister was quite at his ease when he got up to speak. Before touching on the rôle of the police, he severely criticized the machinery of justice.

Then he dwelt at length on the case of the police superintendent who had at one time called on the services of Stavisky as an informer, and, after having paid a tribute to the professional qualities of the Inspector-General of the Criminal Investigation Department at the Sûreté Générale, he blamed him for not having paid closer attention to the reports of the Préfecture of Police.

In comparison with the figures now involved, these two officials, of course, were no more than underlings whose influence on the problem was almost negligible. It has been shown that the letter of recommendation from the police superintendent could not be, and never was, taken seriously by any competent authority. It had been cancelled by the departmental police chief and taken away from Stavisky long before the final outcome of his frauds. As to the practical possibility of an Inspector-General of the Sûreté Générale using minutes and reports from the Préfecture of Police in the Ministries and the courts, this was ridiculous, since the Préfecture itself, despite all its insistence, had not been able to make use of them.

The Prime Minister then blamed the Ministry of Trade for not having had its suspicions aroused earlier by the unusual number of Bayonne bonds in circulation.

He announced that he would table a bill defining any approach to the public authorities as bribery, if it could be shown that whoever made the approach had been promised any material reward, either direct or indirect. Finally, turning to the question of Stavisky's death, he said he was certain it was suicide. But in order to defend himself in advance from the charge of being involved in the denouement of the drama, he deliberately stooped to the lamest of excuses.

'How,' he declared from the rostrum, 'could I punish my subordinates if I had myself given them the order to kill?'

Which amounted to saying that he had punished them beforehand in order to clear himself.

On the well-established fact of the suicide of the swindler, M. Camille Chautemps had, indeed, nothing to reproach himself with, and his excuses were thus quite unnecessary. But his pitiful display of cunning was certainly not calculated to win him the respect of his opponents.

The measures promised by the head of the government were quickly approved by the cabinet and published. The Commissioner of the Sûreté Générale was relieved of his duties and was appointed Administrator of the Comédie Française. Three officials of the Ministry of Trade, including a departmental head, a superintendent at the the Ministry of Labour, and two Prefects, were also relieved of their duties, transferred or censured on various counts. The sanctions imposed on the judiciary were fewer and less severe; almost the only instance during the early days was that the Public Prosecutor lost his post—to become a Judge of the Court of Appeal. These relatively mild penalties were applied gradually and without overmuch publicity.

'Politics,' a distinguished Belgian moralist has said, 'is the art of finding scapegoats'. In France it is not an art. It is a tradition, of which the petty official and the policeman are usually called to pay the price. The most spectacular rôle therefore was reserved for the officials of the two police forces.

, On 22 January 1934, the Minister of the Interior called



the representatives of the Paris press and read out to them a long official statement, the repercussions of which were felt on the following day in the various departments. Inspectors, superintendents, divisional superintendents and one Commissioner were censured, suspended, relieved of their posts, summoned to appear before disciplinary courts, or retired.

In my own case, it was from a journalist friend I learned, before I had received any official notification, that I was to be removed from my position as head of the Criminal Investigation department and posted elsewhere. Despite a certain bitterness, partly over the decision itself but almost as much at the manner in which it was brought to my notice, I felt at the moment a certain relief.

At the same time the judicial proceedings started at Bonneville and Bayonne were transferred to Paris. Twenty-six people were arrested; fifteen charges were proceeded with, and resulted, two years later, in eight sentences of imprisonment, penal servitude and forced labour.

Immediately after the debate in the Chamber the Prime Minister, as he had promised, tabled a draft bill providing for the simultaneous reorganization of the Paris Préfecture and the Sûreté Générale. By the terms of this bill, the Criminal Investigation department and the various departments of the Préfecture of Police, as well as the financial section of the Paris Public Prosecutor's office, were to be transferred to the rue des Saussaies and handed over to three assistant commissioners, under a high official of the central administration. The assistant commissioner of the financial section would have to be a criminal magistrate. He would be assisted by Inspectors of Finance and officials of the Public Registry, appointed by the Minister of Finance. The serving officers of the Criminal Investigation and the General Intelligence departments of the Préfecture of Police would be merged in a special section of the Sûreté Générale, where they would be replaced, little by little, by established officers.

Drawn up in haste and under pressure, this plan ran into

unforeseen difficulties. It removed some of its most indispensable duties from the Préfecture of Police and, on the other hand, burdened the Sûreté Générale with tasks which it would not be qualified to carry out for a long time to come. Questions of departmental authority had not been considered. Furthermore, there were preliminary problems of cost and accommodation for which the Ministry of the Interior was not prepared.

There was every reason to think, moreover, that the proposals, as well as the suggestion of the formation of a Jury of Honour to adjudicate on the political responsibilities involved, were intended to be no more than the trimmings of a hastily improvised plan to save the Cabinet's life. To all practical purposes, they could not possibly be carried out in the form in which they had been put forward and their author himself could have had few illusions on this score. In any case, they never got as far as being debated in Parliament.

The main credit for shaking the Sûreté Générale out of its rut and laying the foundations of a new system must go to M. Sarraut during his period as Minister of the Interior later in 1934. After systematic consultations with the services concerned, and on the basis of more accurate and considered information, he took action and the reforms provided for in his decree of 20 April 1934 were put into force at once with the reorganization of the Commissioner's duties. Two new central departments and eight administrative sections were established under the control of five chief inspectors. In the rue des Saussaies, the introduction of the reforms coincided with the demolition of the old buildings and the construction of a new block designed to provide proper accommodation for the whole of the Sûreté Générale.

In Paris and the provinces, the State police organization now covered one hundred and sixty communes of the departments of the Seine, the Seine-et-Oise and the Seine-et-Marne, and was extended to the most important industrial

areas. The strength of the General Intelligence department on the land, sea and air frontiers was also considerably reinforced.

None the less, the atmosphere within the country was still far from healthy and would not be for some time to come. The final echoes of the Stavisky affair, which were being methodically dealt with in the Law Courts and the Parliamentary Commission, the riots of 6 February and the suicide of Judge Prince, were followed before the year was out by other serious events. King Alexander of Yugoslavia was assassinated at Marseilles by a Serb terrorist coming from Italy, and the Foreign Minister, M. Barthou, was killed by his side. The Commissioner of the Sûreté, M. Berthoin, was present at the tragedy and was held responsible. He was dismissed and could not, consequently, carry through the reforms which he had so successfully inaugurated. The chief concern of his successor, the fourth Commissioner of the Sûreté in the year 1934, was to keep on the right side of the legal profession and of the *Action Française*, of whose representatives and their friends he had a holy terror.

Thus the reform of 1934 could not be as complete as it should have been under the continued pressure of those who introduced it. But, imperfect as it was, it still marked a great step forward.

While in the early days of the scandal, in January and February 1934, the Government was trying to evade its responsibilities by taking administrative measures which it sought to present as drastic, a debate opened in Parliament on an Order of the Day proposing the appointment of a commission of forty-four members chosen by the political parties to inquire into the whole Stavisky affair.

Rejected at first by a large majority, this Order of the Day was re-introduced on 22 January by its mover M. Ybarnegaray, and seconded on the following day by Philippe Henriot, during the vote on the prison administration esti-

mates. The demand that one of the items be referred back, which was equivalent to a motion of 'no confidence' in the Government, was once more rejected by the Chamber after a speech by M. Ernest Lafont, who called on the house to pronounce directly on the main question. Finally M. Léon Blum tabled a second motion, in the name of the Socialists, calling for the appointment of a commission. After examining these two motions, the Steering Committee of the Chamber first declared itself in favour of the principle, and then unanimously approved the draft put forward by the Socialist Party, with a few amendments.

The report of the Steering Committee was placed before the Chamber on 26 January 1934, but the resignation of the Chaumets Cabinet, followed by the formation of the Daladier Cabinet, and its resignation after the riots of 6 February, delayed the debate until 16 February. Finally the Chamber, by 570 votes to 10, decided to appoint a commission of forty-four members 'to investigate all the political and administrative responsibilities incurred since the beginning of the Stavisky affair'.

Formed on 24 February 1934, the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry sat until 31 May 1935, when it published its findings. Clearly influenced by a sense of political solidarity, these findings classed as less serious those responsibilities which, logically, should have been regarded as the gravest. For surely no guilt could be heavier than that of those who had corrupted civil servants' sense of duty and induced them to betray their trust?

'These responsibilities must be regarded,' wrote the chairman, 'in order of moral gravity and of the seriousness of their consequences; first of all, contrary to what might have been the opinion at the beginning of the affair, must be placed administrative responsibilities. Political responsibilities come only later. And perhaps a more important place should be reserved for those responsibilities which we may call social.

'These include the actions of professional men, some of

which amounted to direct or indirect complicity. We refer to the lawyers and doctors of the gang upon whose actions we have already commented; also to those former senior officials who acted as window-dressing on boards of directors or were used as actual employees, sometimes even playing both rôles'.

The Parliamentary Commission, therefore, laid down three degrees of responsibility:

- (1) administrative and legal responsibility;
- (2) social responsibility relating to interference with the competent administrative and legal authorities;
- (3) lastly, political responsibility.

Its *rapporteur*, M. Ernest Lafont, undoubtedly wished to imply by this that the Commission, which represented all shades of opinion, did not regard any party as bearing the complete responsibility. That went without saying, and no one dreamed of contradicting him on this point.

However, even if the *rapporteur* said no more about the nature of the political responsibility, he clearly implied it in his comparisons:

'During our inquiry into the Stavisky affair, which more than once has given us grounds for disgust, we have been unable to avoid thinking of some striking examples of political and administrative probity. One name, especially, has remained in our memory as that of a real hero of our public life. . . .

'If only because it marks such a flagrant contrast, we must mention here the name of Monis, who had held the most eminent posts in the Republic and who still had influential connections which could have reaped him a rich harvest. He was, however, content to plead in the courts for meagre fees, or no fees at all, instead of earning large sums for not pleading, for asking for adjournments or for using his influence. . . .'

Such considerations were enough to invalidate the whole classification and to place political responsibility first on the list.

The Parliamentary Commission would have done better to resurrect the findings reached by its predecessor in April 1914 in the Rochette affair and since unhappily forgotten:

'The Chamber, taking note of the resolution of its Committee of Inquiry, condemns the improper interference of finance with politics and of politics with the courts. It affirms the need for a law on parliamentary incompatibilities. . . .'

As to the guinea-pig directors, the officials, the magistrates and all those who for personal interest, ambition or out of a yes-man mentality, were weak enough to succumb to political interference, it was of little consequence whether their frailties were classed in the second or third category.

From top to bottom of the administrative and political hierarchy, Stavisky had, with a few rare exceptions, made fools of all who had helped him. To distribute the responsibilities equally, it would have been more just, and certainly much simpler, to distinguish two categories only: on the one hand, there were the very small number of those in the highest positions 'who did well out of it', fully aware of what they were doing. On the other, there was the far more numerous band of the weak, the naïve and the duped. The distinction was clear. Only too clear.

In all this chaos, the Royalist leaders seemed to be the only ones who kept cool heads and stuck to a well-established plan. *L'Action Française* was the spearhead of the revolt. On 9 January it launched its first appeal:

'Honest men deprived of their rights,' it said, 'have nothing more to hope for from a judiciary and a police force wallowing in a morass of blood and filth. To defend at once their property and the honour of their country, honest men must rise and do the job themselves.

'Today, the day Parliament is reassembling, when you leave your offices and workrooms, we summon you to gather in your thousands around Parliament and demand honour and justice, to the cry of "Down with the robbers! Down with the assassins!"'

A second appeal followed forty-eight hours later, on Wednesday, 11 January:

'Come in still greater numbers to voice your contempt for all these lies and demand that the whole crew be swept away.'

The first appeal did not meet with much success, but at the rally of 13 January there were scenes of violence and pillage. Pujo entered into negotiations with the Prefect of Police and undertook to disperse his followers on condition that the debates in the Chamber on the Stavisky affair were not continued.

On 22 January there was a third summons from *L'Action Française*. The scenes of violence were repeated on a larger scale. Pujo was arrested, only to be released within twenty-four hours.

On 24 and 27 January came the fourth and fifth appeals, culminating in the demonstrations of the 28th, which led to the resignation of the Chaumet Cabinet.

Meanwhile *L'Action Française* did its best to sustain the offensive by mendacious reports and personal attacks. Against all the evidence, it asserted that Stavisky had been hit by three bullets: 'one in the head, one in the body and one in the leg'. It reminded its readers of the 'murder' of Philippe Daudet by Chief Inspector Delange, 'whose successor, Ducloux, compromised in the Stavisky affair, is involved with German interests, as is shown by the collusion of this senior police official with the arms merchant, Otto Wolf'.

All the tricks of rabble-rousing and provocation were given free rein in the most extravagant form.

Towards the end of January, the Royalist paper began to fear that the supreme command of future operations might slip from its hands, and it complained of the unfair competition of Colonel de la Roque. The Colonel wanted to enrol 'National Volunteers' under the banner of the Croix de Feu, and had prevented his supporters from taking part in the demonstrations of 28 January. However, he was asking no more than to come to an agreement.

In fact, the Colonel was quietly organizing the mobilization of his squads in the provinces as well as in Paris.

The groups of the Young Patriots, the *Solidarité Française*, the French Recovery (*Rédressement Française*), the National Regrouping, the Federation of Taxpayers, and other bodies were all following on one track or the other.

The final appeal was launched by *L'Action Française* on 5 February over the signature of Léon Daudet. It was a plain call to murder:

'For an evil cause, for an unjust cause, to defend swindlers and those in the pay of swindlers, MM. Marchand and Paul Guichard (Commissioner and Commissioner-General of the Paris City Police respectively) are about to spill good French blood. But what will happen? MM. Paul Guichard and Marchand will in their turn be killed, killed without pity, and M. Eugène Frot (Minister of the Interior) will share the same fate. Men who have got guts will avenge their brothers and looking at the miserable corpse of this poor little martinet, who believed that he was doing miracles with his slogan: "No demonstrations or else . . ." will be forced to say: "You asked for it, Frot-Dandin; it is entirely your own fault."'

The poster that contained this provocation to murder was accompanied by faked photographs designed to show that the government intended to stop the demonstrations with negro troops armed with machine-guns, and to use artillery and tanks if necessary.

Camille Chautemps's attempt to sidestep the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry proposed by Philippe Henriot, the transfer by Daladier, his successor in the Premiership, of the head of the Sûreté Générale to the Comédie Française and, above all, the appointment of the Prefect of Police as Resident-General in Morocco, were all exploited as so many scandals added to the original scandal of the Stavisky affair.

Originally raised by Garat, the Deputy and Mayor of Bayonne, the case of Chiappe, the Prefect of Police, became



the chief war cry in the political unrest. Although he had been promoted to a very big post, Chiappe protested and the greater part of the press denounced his transfer as a revolting act of injustice inflicted on an irreproachable official, with the sole intention of making certain of the votes of the Socialist group in the Chamber.

In view of the violence of the demonstrations, which continued throughout January at the behest of the opposition parties, the government considered that public order had not been assured with the necessary firmness and believed the step which it had taken to be perfectly legitimate.

The appeal of 5 February, signed by Léon Daudet, was followed by this warning:

'We invite all good Frenchmen to hold themselves in readiness to respond once again to our appeal to overthrow this despicable régime, at a time and place which we shall indicate.'

On the morning of Tuesday, 6 February, it was the dismissal of the Prefect of Police which served as a pretext for the mobilization of the revolutionary forces:

'Called to power to ensure justice and order, MM. Daladier and Frot, almost as soon as they were appointed ministers, have dismissed the policeman, in order to give free rein to socialist anarchy and to save the honour of thieving freemasons.

'Using the right that is theirs in face of the breakdown of a corrupt administration, the French people will take up this ignominious challenge.

'This evening, when they leave their offices and workshops, they will assemble before the Chamber to the cry of: "Down with the robbers!" to show the Ministry and its parliamentary stooges that they have had enough of this despicable régime.'

The appeals of January 19, 21, 22, 24 and 27 and the demonstrations which followed them had been exercises in mobilization. Followed as they were by the organizations of

war veterans hostile to the government, they had given a chance to all the forces of the opposition to rally their members and assess their strength. The revolutionary technique of street-fighting was given its first tests; the beating-up of individuals, the destruction of public buildings, sacking of shops, attempts at arson and even, at certain points, attacks on the police. The relative weakness of the official come-back gave grounds for the belief that some of the police were not to be counted on.

The excitement of the leagues and those who led them had risen to a frenzy. They chose the day of the presentation of the new government to give the signal for attack. The notice of 5 February and the rally summoned the following day by *L'Action Française* and other papers of similar views was thus able to produce its full effect.

During the afternoon of 6 February, from four o'clock on, small groups of Young Royalists, members of the *Action Française*, Young Patriots and the *Solidarité Française* began to gather round the approaches to the Place de la Concorde. They formed a small nucleus which was rapidly increased by members of the public, between four and six o'clock. These were rubbernecks, people with time on their hands, malcontents whom the daily incitements of the press had drawn there as much from curiosity as from the desire to see a rough house. There were also some workmen, middle-class youths and a certain number of shady characters.

While this first base was being reinforced, the main body of each league or group was taking up the position allotted to it.

The associations of War Veterans formed the most important striking force. Members of the Croix de Feu and their associates had grouped under the command of Colonel de la Roque. The National Association of War Veterans was led by its President, M. Lebecq, a Municipal Councillor of Paris. There were also small numbers of members of the National Union of Combatants, who were out mainly to thwart the

actions of the right-wing organizations, but who only succeeded in increasing the chaos. Finally, a number of Paris Municipal Councillors, supporters of the former Prefect of Police, whose political activities were allied to those of the Leagues, called on the Paris populace to follow them and formed an imposing procession which marched on Parliament.

Their orders were known. They had been given out at the last moment by means of leaflets, posters and special editions. They were to make a mass demonstration before the Chamber of Deputies, to enter the building, by force if necessary, and to compel the whole parliament to withdraw.

All available police units had been mobilized; members of the regular police force, municipal guards, mobile guards, gendarmes and the Paris fire brigade. The headquarters staff realized very quickly that they would be swamped by the extent and violence of the offensive. They had expected a crowd of from ten to fifteen thousand: they found themselves faced with more than forty thousand.

The new Prefect of Police, M. Bonnefoy-Sibour, formerly Prefect of the Department of Seine-et-Oise, had as yet no experience of the problems involved in maintaining order in the capital. His immediate aide, the Commissioner of the City Police, was an old hand at dealing with this sort of trouble, but as luck would have it he had gone down with appendicitis and had been out of action since the previous day. He was replaced by his assistant, M. Marchand.

At about six o'clock, on a given signal, the crowd started streaming towards the head of the Concorde bridge in the direction of Parliament. It clashed with the police cordon, which at the beginning was under the command of a district superintendent. Surprised by the vigour of the first assault, the police called on a platoon of the *Garde Républicaine* for reinforcement, and then advanced slightly with the intention of clearing the approaches to the bridge.

They were greeted by a volley of missiles, scraps of iron,

railings and chunks of cement from the gardens of the Cours-la-Reine. Some of the mounted men were injured. They made a few charges to drive back the crowds, but these proved of little avail; the assailants flocked back as soon as the *Gardes* had withdrawn to their starting line, and built barricades with garden chairs and newspaper kiosks to prevent any further sorties.

In the centre of the square the rioters set fire to a bus. A detachment of police on bicycles ran into a barricade. They were at once attacked by Young Royalists, who broke up their bicycles and beat up a policeman with an iron bar.

At seven o'clock in the evening, the Assistant Commissioner of the City Police arrived on the scene and took command of the operations at the bridge-head, the main centre of the fighting. He ordered the riot act to be read, but this had no effect. Struck by several missiles, the bugler was wounded and had to be taken to the rear. Reinforcements arrived and attempt after attempt was made to clear the Place. The battle was at its height. There were large numbers of injured on both sides. Of a platoon of twenty-five *Gardes*, only four remained unhurt. A good half of the police at this point were out of action.

The first shots were fired by the rioters from the direction of the rue Royale, opposite the point where the assailants were making their main thrust. The rioters had still not succeeded in forcing the defences at the entry to the bridge, but their furious attacks ended by exhausting the forces there, some of whom had been standing up to them for more than two hours. The scraps of iron and pieces of paving thrown by the rioters caused painful wounds. Some of the horses of the mounted men were wounded in the hocks with knives or razor-blades; one was wounded by a small calibre bullet. It was at this moment that the forces of the *Solidarité Française* group, who had gathered at the Richelieu-Drouot crossroads, arrived on the scene in a solid column. They were

the most resolute and violent of all the leagues. Having forced all the isolated cordons set up on the big boulevards, they charged the police at the head of the bridge in a body and hand-to-hand fighting began.

The Assistant Commissioner of the City Police was wounded in the head. The local divisional superintendent had his ankle broken. A Captain of the *Gardes* was seriously wounded in the stomach. Struck at and slashed, the horses fell back in disorder and thus assisted the advance of the attackers. The defences were partially broken through under this furious impact. Disaster was imminent.

It was at this point that the police and the municipal guards, on the point of giving way, seized their arms and fired, at first in the air and then, immediately afterwards, on the rioters. The attack in its turn fell back. An officer of the *Gardes* took over the command in place of the Commissioner. He swiftly reoccupied the ground that had been momentarily given up, consolidated the defences and then, in a series of charges, once again advanced his line. The position had been held and the defeat of the thin line of police, with all its unpredictable consequences, had been averted. But there were seven dead and a large number of wounded among the rioters.

It was barely eight o'clock. While fighting had died down at the approaches to the bridge, the central objective of the rioters, the battle had been renewed at the entry to the rue Royale where a group of rioters tried to break down the doors of the Admiralty. They succeeded in doing so with the aid of a gas standard torn up on the spot and used as a battering ram, and tried to start fires in the ground floor offices by throwing in rags soaked in petrol. In one of them the flames had already spread as high as the mezzanine floor before the firemen from the barracks in the rue Blanche appeared on the scene. They were at once attacked, and the marks of seven bullets were later found on the coachwork of one of their engines. None the less, they were able to extinguish

the flames, which the sailors had not been able to do, failing the necessary equipment. The incident raises the question of what might have happened had the rioters been able to break into the Chamber of Deputies.

The police at last cleared this fresh sector, but not without suffering further casualties. Passing in front of the Hotel Crillon, on the farther side of the rue Royale, they had been struck by a shower of missiles thrown from the windows. A second bus was burnt nearby, in the Avenue Gabriel. In the rue Royale, an ambulance carrying a severely wounded policeman was riddled with scraps of iron. One of the rioters, wearing a Basque beret, fired on it; the bullet broke the windscreen and passed between the driver and the wounded man.

At the two opposite ends of the Place de la Concorde—the bridge leading to Parliament and the southern end of the rue Royale—the situation now appeared stable. The bridge appeared to be solidly occupied in depth by gendarmes, and the approaches had been cleared for some way out. The Gardens of the Tuileries too had been cleaned up and closed.

The battle, however, was not yet over. It was nearly nine o'clock when there appeared on the square, from the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, the imposing column of the National Association of War Veterans, preceded by their colours. But instead of leading it towards the bridge, as some of the rioters called on him to do, its President, M. Lebecq, turned towards the rue Royale. The last files of the column, however, consisting mainly of the association of those decorated for courage on the battlefield, responded to the appeals shouted at them, abandoned the column and marched in good order on the bridge, under the leadership of a general and a reserve colonel.

The assault was renewed. In the course of one of the charges, a mounted *Garde* was struck by a piece of metal and fatally injured.

Meanwhile, M. Lebecq, with the leading files of the

column, wheeled left out of the rue Royale and marched up the Faubourg Saint Honoré towards the Ministry of the Interior. The superintendents and officers, who had been reassured by the peaceful demeanour of the Association of War Veterans, were quickly undeceived. Their orders were to prevent the demonstrators from approaching the Élysée and the Ministry of the Interior.

The offensive had merely switched to another front. There was fighting at the entry to the Faubourg Saint Honoré: the War Veterans broke through the first cordon, then a second at the corner of the rue Boissy d'Anglas, and continued their march as far as the rue d'Aguesseau. Charged by a mounted platoon and by strong reinforcements of police who had come up, they were dispersed before reaching their objectives. Rallied on the boulevards by a former major of Spahis, they returned to the attack and found themselves at the head of the bridge united with their former companions, the Association of those decorated for courage on the battlefield. The two columns together made what must have been the twentieth assault and they were joined by many other groups of rioters.

The lull had been short indeed. Between half-past ten and eleven that evening, attacks and counter-attacks were almost incessant. The forward positions of the defence were driven in. The National Association of Veterans threw in everything it had got. The frenzy of the assailants was at its height. No use was made of firearms on either side, but the sheer numbers of the veterans exercised an almost irresistible pressure. Wedged against the lorries drawn up behind them, the police were crushed, lifted off the ground and in danger of being thrown into the Seine. Some of the rioters succeeded in making their way between the vehicles. The position became, once more, untenable.

The Commissioner of the City Police resumed command and led on to the field such police units as had not yet been engaged. He ordered a baton charge and they attacked with

vigour. The firemen let fly with their hoses. Under this double counter-assault, the rioters gave ground and retreated, but their attacks continued intermittently, interrupted only by police charges.

Finally, about half-past eleven, there was a last and very violent attack. Subjected as they had been to repeated assaults for nearly six hours, exhausted and demoralized, what remained of the original police cordon began to lose heart.

It was then that the Commander of the First Gendarmerie Legion, Colonel Simon, intervened and turned the day. Colonel Simon held no official command on the scene of action. But he had mustered a force of ten officers and four hundred gendarmes from the departments of the Seine and Seine-et-Marne at the police barracks in the Cité, and placed them at the disposal of the Prefect of Police from the start of the trouble. He wanted to see how his men behaved in action and it was thus that he saw the last assault and realized that disaster was at hand. The hard-driven men no longer obeyed orders; the foam-bespattered horses were at their last gasp. Panic threatened.

On his own initiative, Colonel Simon took the responsibility for what might be called a major operation. He rallied all the *Gardes* and gendarmes in the sector who were still unhurt under the leadership of two officers and launched a powerful cavalry charge across the square, covered to right and left by unmounted *Gardes* and police. He led the attack himself, shouting encouragement to his men. Spurred on by his example, horsemen, *Gardes* and police swept forward.

It was the turn of the rioters to lose heart. Seized with panic, they fled in all directions. The barricades were soon demolished and the wave of the counter-attack reached the rue Royale unopposed. Then, instead of returning directly to his starting point, Colonel Simon carried out an encircling movement by way of the Avenue Gabriel and the Champs-Élysées, so as to clear the whole periphery of the square.



Not a single shot was fired in the course of this mopping-up operation. This, unfortunately, was far from the case in the Cours-la-Reine sector, where a similar manœuvre had been met by a shower of missiles from a strong body of rioters sheltered behind the parapet of the Quai de la Conférence. Their patience stretched to the limit, the *Gardes*, police and gendarmes had replied by opening fire heavily. The rioters suffered serious casualties; six dead and seventeen wounded remained on the field, and went to increase the number of victims who had already fallen in the first stage of the insurrection.

On 7 February proceedings were opened against Charles Maurras on charges of incitement to murder and threats of death, and also against Maurice Pujo for incitement to unlawful assembly. A police superintendent accompanied by four inspectors went to Léon Daudet's house with a summons for him to appear at the Law Courts. Daudet refused to go with them, and later maintained that the officers of the Préfecture of Police had been given orders to murder him, had he been foolish enough to accompany them.

There was some question of arresting some of the principal leaders of the disturbances. But it did not seem feasible to proceed on the wider charge of conspiracy against the security of the state and, in fact, the proposed measures were never carried out. The General Intelligence department, however, informed the Minister of the Interior that the assault groups of the *Action Française* were planning to return to the attack armed with grenades, revolvers and steel spikes to protect themselves against cavalry charges.

Meantime a delegation of the Municipal Council of Paris went to the President to demand the formation of a Ministry of National Defence and the reinstatement of MM. Chiappe and Renard. A deputy told one of the outgoing ministers present at the Élysée that if the Cabinet had not resigned, a provisional government would have been set up in the Town Hall about ten o'clock on the evening of the 7th. A pamphlet

declaring the dissolution of Parliament in the name of a Committee of Public Safety had been distributed the day before by the League of Young Patriots.

The leaders of the Leagues had that morning issued orders to their forces to reassemble in the streets, but they countermanded the orders the same afternoon. Colonel de la Roque demobilized the Croix de Feu, telling them that their first objective had been gained, but ordered them to keep in a state of readiness. But to judge from the serious incidents that took place on the afternoon of the 7th, it would seem that appeals for moderation were no longer being listened to, or that the leaders were no longer in control of their men. That evening, some demonstrators appeared in close formation at the cordons on the Avenue Marigny, with the evident intention of going to the Ministry of the Interior or the Élysée. Scenes of violence and looting began again. The police were pelted with stones and scraps of iron. They defended themselves with their rifle butts. One demonstrator, struck on the nose, died near the Avenue des Champs-Élysées where fighting was in full swing. A bus and a newspaper kiosk were burnt. Similar scenes occurred near the Madeleine, at the Gare Saint Lazare, at the Church of the Trinité and on the boulevard Haussmann.

Between the Madeleine and the Drouot crossroads, barricade after barricade was up on the boulevards and most of the shops had been looted. The lighting standards were torn down and the gas mains broken and set alight.

The demonstrators were evidently those of the previous day. Some whom the police arrested were found to be carrying arms of various descriptions, revolvers, razors, stilettos, coshes and bludgeons. On the boulevards and the Champs-Élysées, four rioters were still lying, two with fractured skulls, a third accidentally run over by a lorry and a fourth dead from heart failure. No shots were fired that day by the police, who had suffered about three hundred casualties.

February 8 passed in relative calm, but the disorders

broke out again on the 9th, this time at the instigation of the Communist Party, which was out for revenge. Summoned by their papers, with *L'Humanité* at the head of them, the workers of Paris assembled *en masse* at eight o'clock in the evening on the Place de la République. They demanded the arrest of Chiappe and the leaders of the fascist leagues, as well as the imprisonment of the Ministers who had resigned and the dissolution of Parliament. On the same day the C.G.T. announced a mass demonstration and a general strike for 12 February.

The Communist demonstration of 9 February was forbidden by the Prefect of Police, who filled the Place de la République with police and ordered all the Métro stations that gave access to it to be closed. Barricades were set up in the streets around, and a big street battle took place for the third time. The rioting spread in the direction of the Gare de l'Est and the Gare du Nord and extended gradually to the Buttes-Chaumont, to Belleville and to Menilmontant.

Like the residents of the bourgeois quarters, those of the working-class districts took sides with the demonstrators against the police and pelted the officers with missiles from their windows. However, none of the shops was looted, and *L'Humanité* pointed this out with a certain pride, underlining the comparison and saying that the workers had not behaved like criminals.

February 9 closed with four demonstrators dead and twenty-four with bullet wounds. The police had a hundred and forty wounded, including four by firearms and three by knives.

February 12, the last day of a revolutionary movement that had lasted for five days, was to claim five more victims. The general strike orders, according to the C.G.T. figures, brought out a million and a half workers in the Paris area. A fight started around a tram depot. Shots were fired at the police. Their fire was returned and one worker was fatally injured. At Billancourt, a woodworker was killed on a bay-

cade by a revolver shot. A third and a fourth died after being beaten up.

Incidents no less grave took place at Marseilles, where a young post-office employé, wounded by two bullets, died in hospital. At Villeurbanne, Oyonnax, Périgueux, Nantes, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Mulhouse, Amiens and Toulon there were reports of minor disturbances, followed by a small number of arrests.

The mass demonstration organized on the same day by the Socialists was the most impressive of all, both because of the huge crowds that took part and the peaceful character it bore from beginning to end. Under the leadership of the party chiefs, it went off without a single incident, which was in those troubled times a fact of no little significance.

Twenty-seven French citizens in all were killed in the riots of February 6, 7, 9 and 12, fourteen between half-past seven and midnight on February 6 alone. Of these, the *Action Française* had four victims, the Young Patriots two and the *Solidarité Française* one. The total of seriously wounded was fifty-seven, including sixteen followers of, or sympathizers with, the *Action Française*, two of the Young Patriots, eight of the *Solidarité Française* and two war veterans of the Croix de Feu. Thus, half the demonstrators killed and three-quarters of those seriously wounded during the first hours belonged to leagues and groups of the right and the extreme right.

This brief recapitulation reflects closely enough the political nature of an insurrectionary movement, whose deeper causes go back long before the scandal which served as an occasion for the outbreak. Unrest and indignation had been methodically stirred up for ten years past by campaigns of denigration intended to undermine the structure and institutions of the state.

The revolt had been openly foretold and announced in the press during the years and months that had preceded it. In February 1933, *Le Réveil du Contribuable*, an opposition paper, reported in these terms a statement made at Magic City

before an audience of several thousands, by a leader of the Federation of Taxpayers:

'We will march on that den which calls itself Parliament and, if necessary, we will use whips and sticks to sweep those nitwits out of the Chamber.'

Over the signature of M. François Le Grix, the *Revue hebdomadaire* of 25 November 1933, gave details of how the promised coup would be carried out:

'It will be done quite simply and quite quickly. The Chamber will be sent packing *sine die* and Paris will be put under martial law after a few demonstrations by taxpayers and unemployed. There have already been some dress rehearsals, in which the municipal guards and the police have taken part. Perhaps, if the leaders have to be ready a few weeks from now, it is better that they should not yet be named. But I can assure you that they are getting ready for action.'

*Le Capital* of 28 November 1933 declared that the best minds were considering the experiment of an authoritarian government on the Italian and German model.

Published a month before the outbreak of the Stavisky scandal, these articles showed clearly that the forces of the opposition were waiting with arms at the ready for the first signal for the attack.

As for the Royalist paper, it was screaming with exultation the day after the first blood had been shed, and Maurice Pujo was to declare a little later before the Commission of Inquiry, 'I am proud to boast that, during the month of January, it was *L'Action Française* that took the lead'. On 7 February, Léon Daudet expressed his enthusiasm by reporting fifty dead and thousands of wounded, which were still not enough to sate his bloodthirsty appetite, for he at once launched a fresh appeal:

'At your head, at the decisive moment, people of Paris, we shall be happy to shed our blood, if necessary, for your deliverance, for the salvation of our country, for the annihila-

tion of this régime of death which calls itself the Republic, and for the King who alone can deliver you.'

Although so ready to 'shed his blood', Daudet quite forgot to tell his troops that he had prudently withdrawn to Brussels on the first day of the riots and that, on returning to Paris, about eight o'clock in the evening, he had gone no less prudently to bed, far from the glow of the flames that he had ignited.

Later, furious and shaken at having been summonéd by the Prefect of Police, he threatened in his usual inimitable style, the Ministers whom he held responsible :

'I demand, Daladier, you swine, and Frot, you bloody swine, to know the meaning of this. Answer me, you blood-thirsty scum!' (*L'Action Française*, 8 February 1934.)

In the same number appeared the proclamation of the Duc de Guise which, in all probability, Daudet had gone to Brussels to prepare two days before :

'Frenchmen, you see to what a state sixty years of the Republic, of government by parties, has brought you. Frenchmen of all classes, of whatever origin you may be, it is time for you to rally to the idea of monarchy, upon which was founded and which for centuries continued to maintain, the greatness of France.

'JEAN in exile.'

The affair had been well organized and the Pretender was ready. The indispensable popular backing had been provided by the associations of war veterans, the Croix de Feu, the Paris Municipal Council and those groups in sympathy with them. At the long hoped-for zero hour all the opposition forces had rallied behind a programme of political strategy meticulously prepared by men who claimed to represent the monarchy but who in their hearts only sought for a dictatorship.

In 1934 as in 1918 Léon Daudet coveted the supreme command of the police, or of the law—if not both at the same

time. But within a fortnight he did not hesitate, while awaiting better things to betray the Duc de Guise fairly and squarely, and to offer his services to the new leader of the Republican Government, through the columns of *L'Action Française*:

'Monsieur Doumergue, I will make you an honest offer, which will clear the air and prevent the civil war towards which, no one can doubt, we are now rushing headlong. Instal me as Minister of Justice in place of Chéron. None will be found to question the decision at a moment like this. I shall not dwell upon the fact that I have held important posts before; you will realize I know what's what. I will do only what is necessary, but what is necessary will be done.' (*L'Action Française*, 24 February, 1934.)

One cannot reproach Léon Daudet with any lack of modesty in his views and his plans. In 1918 he knew where all the spies were; in 1934 he knew the whereabouts of all the men opposed to the well-being of the French people, and he aimed at playing officially a rôle of the first rank in the fate of his country. But not exclusively, it will be noted, for the benefit of the King.

There are several phases to be considered in connection with the rôle of the police during the afternoon and evening of 6 February.

The first phase was that of the attack launched from five o'clock onwards by the shock troops of the *Action Française* and its supporters.

They met with resistance from the police and *Gardes*, whose strength, in less than two hours, was reduced by a half. All the injuries recorded were among their ranks. Two *Gardes*, one policeman, one gendarme and a police superintendent were wounded by small-arms fire. The one death was that of a mounted *Garde*, struck on the head by a piece of iron. At this time not a single shot had been fired by the police.

Between five o'clock and midnight there were one

thousand six hundred and sixty-four wounded in the dressing stations and hospitals, all belonging to the forces of law and order. They included nine hundred and sixty-nine policemen and six hundred and ninety-five *Gardes* and gendarmes, eleven of them officers: ninety-two of them were seriously injured, and three hundred and sixty-four in such a state that they would be unable to take up their duties again for a long time to come.

The Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, appointed on 24 February to investigate the causes of the disorders and assess the responsibilities incurred by all parties, was composed, like the Stavisky commission, of forty-four members drawn proportionately from the various political parties. The left and the extreme left were thus represented by twenty-six members; the centre and the right by eighteen.

During their deliberations, the members spent a long time discussing whether the Government, the Prefect of Police, the Commissioner of the City Police, the Police Superintendents or the officers of the gendarmerie had given orders to fire on the demonstrators. The reply was a unanimous negative. There was no question that the first shots, between five o'clock and half-past seven, had been fired by the demonstrators. It was only when the police were at the end of their tether—the alternative would have been to give way or to betray their duty—that they had opened fire spontaneously in self-defence.

Would the presence of the former Prefect of Police, who had been dismissed, or that of the Commissioner of the City Police, unavoidably absent for reasons of health, have modified in any way the course of events? Would a better informed intelligence service, a more carefully worked out plan of defence, better liaison between the different units, have been able to prevent unnecessary violence and bloodshed? It is possible, if not probable. But in any case the responsibility for the disaster could not be imputed to the police.



Jeered at and discredited for a whole year past, as had been their comrades in the Sûreté services, attacked one day by the forces of the right and the next by their opponents, insulted and molested by an ill-informed people wherever they might be, left to their own devices at the most critical moment, the officers and men of the Préfecture of Police and the gendarmerie had done their duty nobly on 6 February, heedless both of danger and subversive appeals.

They were in no way discouraged by the trials they had to undergo in the days that followed. At its general meeting at the Préfecture on 26 February 1934, the Police Union passed a resolution affirming 'the devotion of the police to the republican régime and its institutions' and proclaiming 'their firm and unswerving determination to defend them, if need be, at the cost of their lives'.

*Le Progrès de la Gendarmerie*, the paper of the federation of retired gendarmes and *Gardes Républicains* of Paris, expressed the same sentiments in its issue of 23 February, and declared its firm intention to oppose any measures taken against the Republic.

The Commission of Inquiry, in its report, over the signature of its Chairman, M. Marc Rucart, left no doubt about its opinion, either:

'The Government of the Republic cannot but be proud of the loyalty, the devotion to law and order and the fidelity shown during the regrettable occurrences of 6 February by those—police, *Gardes Républicains* of Paris, mobile police and gendarmes—whose duty it was to prevent the insurrection from reaching Parliament where the elected representatives of the nation were in session.'

The tribute was well merited, but it was tardy. For, despite the warnings and the support of a police force whose loyalty had been beyond reproach, the governments which followed one another in France between 1924 and 1934 had failed to recognize up to the very last minute the magnitude

of the threats made against them, and had not foreseen the attack.

As *Le Petit Bleu* said on 11 February 1934, even at the height of the sitting on the evening of 6 February the Ministers and deputies had not an inkling of the danger and did not understand that they were in peril at any moment of being swept away by the storm.

'It is probably true that amongst all those imprisoned in the beleaguered Chamber on the night of February 6 to 7 not one deputy in twenty had a clear idea of the position. There is no question but that the cordons would have been swept away if the guards had not opened fire. It is no less certain that, had this been so, Parliament would have been taken by storm and all within the building, whether members or not, would have been lynched, regardless of their views, and that the fire which would have followed would have made Van der Lubbe himself jealous. They did not understand.'

At their first contact with the assailants even the humblest of the Paris police had fortunately understood better and more swiftly. In defending to the last the positions assigned to them they had, in those sadly memorable days, saved the country from the long drawn-out horrors of a civil war. Their devotion should not be forgotten.

It was these men in uniform, policemen, *Gardes* and gendarmes, it was these men—the 'cops'—who, under the command of two forceful leaders, Commissioner Marchand and Colonel Simon, at this critical turning point of history, had saved Parliament.

They had thus postponed for six years 'the strangling of the trollop', that most cherished dream of the two Academicians, temporarily the masters of French action and French thought.

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## Conspiracy

THE MOST fervent of the Young Royalists and Leaguers who had been at the Concorde on 6 February 1934 had felt that victory was at hand, almost at the end of their razor-blade-tipped sticks. They bitterly regretted that they had let slip so good a chance either of restoring the King or of seizing the reins of power for themselves. Discontented with their leaders, they reproached them for writing too much, talking too much and then, at the moment for action, openly deserting the field of battle.

After the failure of this mass attack, another favourable moment was unlikely to come for a long time, unless it were prepared in advance by patient undermining. So, in December 1935, well before the dissolution of the Leagues, seventy Young Royalists, for the most part belonging to the 7th Squad of the Paris area, decided to abandon the *Action Française* and found a splinter group, which at first they called the Secret Committee for Revolutionary Action or, as its French initials went, the C.S.A.R. A little later, shortly after the parliamentary elections of 1936, the C.S.A.R. was to become the Secret Organization of National Revolutionary Action (O.S.A.R.N.). But the names C.S.A.R. and *la Cagoule*—the Hood—were always those by which the public knew the plotters. Their action did not stop short at their name. It was to become part of the train of events, though it was none the more French for all that.

Later, in certain of the provincial branches, in order solemnly to stress the secret nature of their deliberations, the conspirators covered their heads with hoods. This gave

them their popular name of the 'Cagouleurs', the Hooded Men.

Their leader was the founder of the group, Eugène Deloncle, former student of a maritime engineering college, and a naval engineer. His principal assistants were: Filiol, Corrèze, Bouvyer, Corre, the brothers Puireux, Jakubiez, Cachier, Fauran, Méténier, Roidot, Bernollin, Crespin, Dr Martin, General Dusseigneur and a number of others whose names will appear as events develop. In the provinces, the most notable was Joseph Darnand, a transport contractor at Nice, already mentioned as a star of the *Action Française*.

What words, pen and cosh had been unable to bring about, Deloncle and his followers were determined to achieve by dagger, by powder and by shot. Somewhat anarchic in ideas, their chief preoccupation was to destroy first; after that, they would see.

The execution of this programme called for a numerous body of supporters and considerable capital and material resources. It also required a creed. This would be anti-communism, even though it had often been used before. To the communist *putsch* periodically predicted as imminent, and which the republican régime would be incapable of putting down, Deloncle would be ready to oppose, preventively if necessary, a *putsch* by the forces of authoritarianism which he represented. Once the great struggle had been launched, he would follow up his own success. If, despite all the forecasts, the threatened *putsch* did not materialize, he would do his best to provoke it and public opinion could be stirred up by 'warning shots'. Such were, in short, the basis, the programme and the aims of the movement.

The Chief of the O.S.A.R.N. reckoned, roughly, on a strength of from a hundred to a hundred and twenty thousand men who were to be recruited progressively and organized on a military basis. Supporting Eugène Deloncle, there was a permanent secret council, or executive com-

mittee, composed of Filiol, Corrèze, Jeantet and Eugène's brother, Henri Deloncle.

Based on army procedure, the General Staff was made up of four departments: (1) Recruiting and Discipline; (2) Intelligence; (3) Training and Instruction; (4) Arms, Material and Transport. These departments were headed respectively by Eugène Deloncle, Dr Martin, Cachier and Moreau de la Meuse.

The Disciplinary Council was made up of Eugène Deloncle, Jeantet, Dusseigneur, Corrèze and Blot. The medical service was under the control of Dr Blondin-Walter, the files under Henri Deloncle.

The Paris region was divided into two parts, making up in all seven brigades. The Seventh Brigade was that of the suburbs. It was called the 'execution squad'. Each brigade was composed of two regiments, each regiment of three battalions, each battalion of three companies and each company of three platoons.

The O.S.A.R.N. included a number of older groups which it had united under its control, such as the Union of Defensive Action Committees (U.C.A.D.), founded earlier in Paris by General Dusseigneur, and in the provinces it also controlled a number of secret societies known as the 'Z' group. Most of these were later tracked down. They included the Patriots of Paris, the National Militiamen, the Anti-Soviet Rally, the National and Social Office of Documentation, French Algeria, the Patriots of Auvergne, the Patriotic North, the Reawakened Lyonnais, the Knights of the Sword, the Tricolour Circle, the Military Patriotic Group and the Dieppe Group.

The National Militiamen, the Patriots of Auvergne, the Anti-Soviet Rally, French Algeria and the Knights of the Sword played an important rôle in the Cagoule. All their supporters, whatever their rank or duties, had to take an oath of fidelity. They were told, in the course of this ceremony, that carelessness or betrayal were punishable by death. The in-

structions concerning the intelligence services stipulated that 'the sense of duty and the realization of the circumstances must be so exalted that every man must consider himself free of every moral and social obligation when engaged in the execution of a mission. He must give himself up to his job without reserve, any idea of pardon for a failure must be ruled out, for a man who enters such a team does not leave it.' New recruits were told to meet, now at the house of one, now at another's, for practice in the handling of arms and to perfect themselves in the theory of street fighting, for long a subject of study by the *Action Française*.

Considerable sums were spent on equipping, arming and maintaining all these forces which, from the first to the last man, had to be inspired by an unwavering faith. But human reactions cannot be translated as easily as that into figures and formulas. Every hour of its life an undertaking of this size is at the mercy of a dozen unforeseen problems and as many false moves, of a score of denunciations and a hundred incidents of everyday life, of which even the slightest may be enough to put out of action a mechanism so finely balanced.

Only people completely ignorant of administrative matters, simple beyond belief, spellbound, confused and mentally poisoned, as were these besotted disciples of the *Action Française*, could imagine that such a conspiracy could ever attain its ends if it were not firmly based on the goodwill of the people.

But though M. Léon Daudet might have trumpeted forth his misrepresentations and his slanders of the Criminal Investigation department of the *Sûreté Générale*, now the *Sûreté Nationale*, the Criminal Investigation department was ready.

Once again the important fact, the great event, the most surprising facet of a sensational discovery, was the unexpected result of an apparently quite commonplace incident. It was the kind of simple truth, of which one is instinctively distrust-

ful by a natural perversity and which can only be accepted with reservations.

In 1934 it was the theft of a suitcase, whose owner had nothing whatever to do with Stavisky, which had set the police on the trail of the absconding swindler. In 1937 it was the abandonment of two similar pieces of luggage which was to place in the hands of the Sûreté the first strands of the Cagoulard revolutionary net.

At the end of November 1936 two suitcases had been deposited in the cloakroom of the Central Station at Lille. They had been brought by a traveller from Milan and bore the address of a certain M. Jean-Baptiste, staying at the Metropole Hotel in Brussels. After the statutory period of three months, the customs authorities opened the cases and in them, as well as clothing and toilet articles of some value, they found documents relating without any shadow of doubt to a big traffic in arms.

Following the usual official channels, the local Sûreté, the mobile police and eventually the Criminal Investigation department were one by one apprised of the discovery. A police superintendent sent by the Commissioner of the Sûreté Nationale came to Lille, impounded the documents and went at once to Brussels where, with the aid of his Belgian colleagues, he began his inquiries.

Jean-Baptiste was known at the Metropole Hotel, but had not been seen there for some time past. The manager of the hotel thought that he might be in Antwerp, where he had close business connections with a M. Juif and a M. Boufflers, both of that city.

In Antwerp no trace was to be found either of M. Jean-Baptiste or of M. Juif; and for very good reasons. But the superintendent easily traced M. Boufflers. M. Boufflers declared that he had not seen his two friends for three months past and appeared very surprised at this, for he had important business dealings with them which had been held up at a critical point. He had reasons to fear that something

might have happened to them. Closely interrogated. M. Boufflers ended by revealing secrets which allowed his questioner, and later the courts, to reconstruct the dramatic circumstances of the double disappearance.

Juif lived as a rule at Nice. In the early summer of 1936 he had come for a time to Belgium, together with Duchamp, known as Jean-Baptiste, for the purpose of buying a quantity of arms which he proposed to smuggle into France. With this aim in view, he had rented a villa at Oudembourg near Antwerp, to serve the two partners as a storehouse and transit centre, as well as a residence. There they received agents, tous and salesmen.

Their first purchases were made at Liège and consisted of several consignments of revolvers. Then, in August, Juif had met his friend and former employer Boufflers in Antwerp and told him the secret of his business. Boufflers agreed to introduce Juif to M. Fromont, Director of the ARMAT (Arms and Military Material) firm at Antwerp, a friend of Degrelle, leader of the Rexist party. They soon came to an agreement. Indeed, in one of the suitcases abandoned by Jean-Baptiste at Lille three receipts had been found, signed by Fromont, for a total figure of 250,000 Belgian francs. Fromont had undertaken to supply Juif and Jean-Baptiste with arms valued at two million gold francs in successive consignments. By July he had already received 1,720,000 francs. The arms had come from the Weeland enterprise at 8 Zilmerstrasse, Berlin. This firm had delivered them sometimes through Fromont, sometimes through the Puper manufacturing company of Herstal. One of these deliveries consisted of two hundred Schmeisser tommy-guns.

In Belgium, however, the alarm had been given. A Parisian Cagoulard, an engineer in the Hotchkiss firm, who had gone to Herstal to supervise a test, imprudently let slip that these arms were intended for a French political group and not for Republican Spain, as the personnel of the Puper company had been led to believe. It was at this point in their inquiries



that the investigators began to suspect the existence of a widespread conspiracy in France. On their return to Paris, they unmasked the leading figures of the Cagoule and identified specifically Deloncle and Jeantet.

Once they were put on the alert, the Belgian police acted, and held up a second shipment of three hundred Schmeisser sub-machine-guns bought by Fromont on behalf of Juif and Jean-Baptiste. The delivery route of the Schmeisser machine-guns was now cut in the north. The executive committee of the Cagoule, represented by Jeantet, played with the idea of re-establishing the traffic by sea. Jeantet undertook to raise a crew and charter a ship, but the negotiations came to nothing and ended in a violent dispute. Each of the sailors engaged demanded twenty thousand francs compensation for loss of time. Jeantet compounded at five thousand, after terrifying their spokesman with threats which were far from equivocal.

Already suspect in the eyes of their employers, Juif and Jean-Baptiste after this breakdown finally lost what little credit they still retained. It was known in Paris that they had been living lives of luxury quite out of proportion to their known resources. They were suspected of increasing the price of the arms, of embezzlement, and of negotiating with other foreign buyers for their own advantage. Also, they knew far too much and were frequently lacking in even the most elementary prudence. The Cagoule therefore decided to suspend the traffic through Belgium and, in accordance with the disciplinary rules freely entered into under the terms of their oath, to arrange for the disappearance of their two untrustworthy agents.

On 21 September 1936 a telegram signed Marie, the pseudonym of Eugène Deloncle, asked Jean-Baptiste to come to Paris. Instead of replying to this summons, Jean-Baptiste went to Italy to attempt, on Juif's suggestion, to fix up a new job there. On his return to Belgium, he stopped at Lille, left his suitcases in the cloakroom and this time

replied to an imperious and urgent summons dated 24 October.

Juif did not feel very happy about the recall of his friend. He told his wife, and added, 'I am worried about him, but I don't think they'll do away with him.' That was, however, the fate that awaited him within the next forty-eight hours.

Received in Paris on 27 October by young Corrèze, Deloncle's private secretary, Jean-Baptiste was taken after dinner to Deloncle's house. There he was ushered into a hall where the Secret Committee was in session. Behind a large table were seated General Dusseigneur, Eugène Deloncle, Crespin, who had been carrying out secret inquiries at Antwerp, Jeantet, who was responsible for the supply of arms, and the secretary, Corrèze.

General Dusseigneur read out a short indictment. Crespin summed up in a few pregnant phrases the results of his inquiries and gave details of the embezzlements, swindles and indiscretions with which the accused man was charged. Finally, Deloncle decided upon the supreme penalty.

Two men dragged Jean-Baptiste away, already more dead than alive, and put him in a car which drove away towards the suburbs and stopped on the fringes of a forest.

Jean-Baptiste Duchamp was never seen again by his family or his friends or in the business circles which he used to frequent. According to André Desert, one of the officers who investigated the whole affair, the unhappy man was executed with a dagger and his body buried on the spot.

The sudden disappearance of his friend and associate made Juif more and more uneasy. Feeling Belgium too hot to hold him, he too thought of rehabilitating himself by starting up anew in Italy where he still had a number of contacts. Accompanied by a young friend named Hallumie, from the *Action Française*, he went to San Remo and rented a house called the Villa Hilda on the outskirts. His plan was to organize a new transit centre there as he had done previously at Oudembourg.

Once installed, he renewed contact with the Commendatore Boccalaro, representative of the Beretta arms factory, with a view to making fresh purchases of rifles and explosives. But, whatever he may have thought, the Executive Committee of the O.S.A.R.N. had not forgotten him. On 14 December 1936, less than two months after the disappearance of Jean-Baptiste, Juif in his turn mysteriously disappeared from the Villa Hilda. And on 7 February 1937, his body, riddled with bullets, was found in a sewer on the outskirts of Cesio in Italy.

Since he was short of money when he arrived at San Remo, Juif had told his friend Hallumie to go to Deloncle and ask him to open a credit for the business he had in hand. He was thus walking blindfold into the murder trap the executive committee was already preparing for him. His request was not refused and Hallumie was told to tell him that the funds would shortly be provided. On 13 December, since nothing had arrived, Juif telephoned from San Remo to Darnand, who was at Nice, asking for further information. Darnand replied that a messenger was due that very evening, and asked Juif to come to Nice to meet him. But Juif was suspicious and delegated Hallumie to go to the rendezvous.

At Nice Hallumie met Darnand, who was accompanied by Jeantet who had come from Paris. He had not got the promised money with him but said that he could get it very quickly at Marseilles, if Hallumie were willing to go there with him immediately. At Marseilles there was a further delay. Jeantet left his companion for a moment and on re-joining him pretended that he had just received instructions for Hallumie to take the train at once to Paris, where he was to go to the Hotel Moderne and await orders.

Hallumie did so. On 17 December, the day after his arrival, he was approached in the hall of the hotel by an unknown man who said to him, 'The affair about which you were told to come here has now been settled. There is no further object in your journey. You can return to Nice. Here is a second-class ticket.'

On his return to Nice, and thence to San Remo, Hallumie discovered that Juif was nowhere to be found and that the Villa Hilda had been turned upside down. Just at this moment Commendatore Boccalaro telephoned for news and on hearing of Juif's prolonged absence announced that he was coming over at once. Ten minutes later he appeared and took charge of a consignment of revolvers for which Juif had omitted to pay. He preferred, he said, to deal henceforward with Darnand direct.

It did not take Hallumie long to guess the reason for the complicated trip which Jeantet and Darnand had forced upon him. The sole aim of the successive journeys had been to get him away from the Villa Hilda long enough for the execution of his friend Juif.

The trick was obvious. No less obvious, now it was known that their owner was dead, was the reason for abandoning in the Lille cloakroom the two tell-tale suitcases whose contents were to put the police on to the plot. It is impossible to think of everything.

In the course of 1936, before the Belgian purchasing mission which was to prove fatal to them, Juif and Jean-Baptiste, with the backing of an influential Italian, had already had dealings with the Beretta firm. At the same time, by coincidence, Eugène Deloncle and General Dusseigneur had gone to Rome and asked for an audience with Mussolini. The traffic with Italy dates from this moment. It was organized with the help of the Knights of the Sword, a secret society which was founded in 1935 at Nice by a certain Dr Faraut, and which later became associated with the O.S.A.R.N. It was the adherents of this group who wore a hood at their gatherings.

Dr Faraut worked almost openly for the realization of the Hitlerian programme in France. He went frequently to Germany, especially to Erfurt, where he maintained close relations with various political bodies. He had been seconded to

the Knights of the Sword by Agnely, a partner of Darnand, who had placed his removals firm at the disposal of the arms convoys.

It was later found possible to reconstruct the working of one of these convoys, which started in the Auvergne, in the greatest detail.

In July 1937, Méténier, a very influential lieutenant of Deloncle's, sent an emissary to Vauclard, an active adherent of the Clermont-Ferrand branch of the Children of Auvergne.

The emissary introduced himself by the counter-sign of tossing a coin in his right hand. He then explained that Vauclard must go by car to the neighbourhood of Chambéry to take delivery of a convoy of arms and transport them to the vicinity of Thiers. At the entry to a tunnel about two hundred metres from Chambéry, Vauclard would find a light van, whose driver would address him by the name of 'Jean': Vauclard would reply 'Bart'. Once contact had been made, Vauclard would load the cases of arms, which he would himself deliver on the following day to Méténier's emissary somewhere between La Monnerie and Thiers.

Vauclard accepted the mission. He was to be accompanied by a friend of his called Vandekerckove as a reserve driver. Everything took place as arranged. A large stock of carbines and Beretta tommy-guns was thus laid in.

The delivery of this war material could not have been carried out without the complicity of the Italian authorities. The inquiry established that Méténier and Darnand had several times met Captain Navale, Chief of the Counter-Espionage Service at Turin, and Anfuso, an Embassy attaché and a friend of Count Ciano. They also had direct contact with Colonel Emanuele of the Royal Carabinieri, an intelligence specialist.

Deloncle had also gone to Spain to negotiate the purchase of Mauser ammunition, which was manufactured at Toledo. This was smuggled in easily enough by way of San Sebastian and through the mountains of the Basses-Pyrénées. One of

the traffickers admitted that he had smuggled three hundred cases of dismantled tommy-guns into France by this route."

All available sources of supply, both in France and abroad, were thus being exploited. Thanks to its many accomplices, the O.S.A.R.N. was able, moreover, to purchase surplus stocks of arms collected after 1920 on the various battlefields. Detonators and explosives were stolen from the warehouses of the Public Works Department, and there were also thefts of up-to-date service equipment from military establishments. On the night of 18-19 August 1937, machine-guns and tommy-guns disappeared from the Theremin barracks at Laon. They were later found, in 1938, in the store-houses of the Cagoule.

The Laon raid was only one of a series that were to be made on barracks and military stores. These were prepared by the intelligence services of the O.S.A.R.N., as was proved by the notes and questionnaires found at the houses of certain supporters, which ran as follows:

*Marmande store: guard, ten men; rifles, cartridges.*

*Fort la Briche. What are the ways and chances of getting in?*

*Cap Janet Powder Magazine. The chief of the guards belongs to the group. All his munitions are at our disposal.*

*Fort Mont Valérien. This store is designed to hold 100,000 rifles. The captain in charge can get lorries inside and allow them to leave again fully loaded without interference from anyone.*

*A soldier of the Second Aeronautical Regiment at Villacoublay told one of us that he could guarantee to get hold of four or five aircraft at the right moment and could also find the necessary pilots.*

*Cormeilles Fort. Stocks of powder and telephone material. Guard: One company sergeant-major; neutral. Two privates, changed every fortnight. Access: there are many breaches in the walls.*

*Military Patriotic Group. The N.C.O.s of C.A.1 and C.A.2 have duplicate keys of the store rooms containing machine-guns. The keys of the powder magazine are in my possession.*

They worked, spied, and betrayed their country efficiently in the Intelligence Section of the Cagoule. No foreign espionage service could have done better.

But Italy, Spain or France were, none the less, only of secondary importance as sources of arms. The most abundant and surest was Germany and, after delays dictated by the circumstances, it was with Berlin that Jeantet decided to try and re-establish contact. On a trip to Antwerp, he made contact again with Fromont and gave him an order for 1,700 pistols, 300 sub-machine-guns, 2,700 clips, 285,000 cartridges, four machine-guns, 25 belts and four re-charging units.

Then he hit on the idea of summoning the Schmeisser representative, M. Heyman, to Paris in the name of the Iraqi Legation, where he had contacts. Thanks to the complicity of a Legation official and in the absence of the Minister, he received M. Heyman and gave him a number of large orders. Assisted by two confederates, he presented letters from the Iraqi Government with all the stamps and seals in order. All these purchases, effected through Fromont or Heyman, were to be delivered in Geneva.

But the Iraqi Legation got wind of the fraud in time, lodged a complaint and blocked deliveries. Only the Fromont orders were delivered in Switzerland, where confederates came by road to pick them up.

As the result of an accident during one of these runs, chance once again played into the hands of the investigators and allowed them to unmask practically the whole organization at one swoop.

As at Lille some months earlier, it was conscientious and inquisitive customs officers who were responsible. On 17 October 1937 an unusual incident aroused their suspicions. On the right hand side of the road which leads from the Swiss frontier to the village of Rousses, the first French post, they discovered a large number of German 9 mm. revolver cartridges. The ground was littered with them, especially

along the edges of the road. Following this clue up to the frontier, they advised their Swiss colleagues of the discovery. The latter had made similar finds on their own territory.

The superintendent of the Sûreté who, earlier in the year, had carried out the investigations in Belgium into the disappearance of the two O.S.A.R.N. agents, already knew something of the affair; in particular he had his eye on Deloncle and his closest associates. He sent down to the Swiss frontier an inspector who got him a list of all the vehicles and drivers who had passed through the frontier control on 16 October. On the list appeared the name of Jakubiez, driving a Ford car registered in the name of Eugène Deloncle. A garage proprietor in the rue Scheffer revealed that this car was used sometimes by Deloncle, sometimes by Jeantet or Jakubiez. Jakubiez interrogated point-blank in the street and later taken to the rue des Saussaies, made no bones about admitting that he had been carrying sacks of cartridges, one of which had broken open *en route*.

When he was searched, he was found to be carrying a notebook whose contents made very interesting reading. This invaluable document enabled the police to deal a deadly blow at the Cagoule. Among other things, it referred to purchases of tools, bricks and cement, and contained a certain number of addresses, which were subsequently verified. The materials, it turned out, were for the construction of fourteen arms stores in greater Paris and the addresses were those of the men who were to be put in charge of them.

On one page of Jakubiez's notebook there appeared prominently the address of the Villa la Futaie at La Jonchère, in Rueil. The address was immediately raided and officers of the Sûreté Nationale made some startling discoveries. In the spacious cellar a secret cell had been installed, the entrance to which gave on to an underground gallery whose entry was concealed behind bottle-racks. The entrance was through a door of iron and masonry weighing nearly a quarter of a ton and almost a foot thick, which pivoted with the aid of a



wheel revolving on a metal plaque. The cell was entirely cemented and was closed by two more iron doors, one of which was provided with a grille. An iron bar fixed at one end to the floor and at the other to the ceiling was fitted with two rings, to which prisoners might be attached. A sealed grille allowed for the drainage of water. In a box-room nearby was found a consignment of revolvers, cartridges and two daggers with triangular blades made of sawn-off bayonets.

The fortified cell was to serve, when the time came, as a prison for such of the leading politicians as had not been executed on the spot and whom the O.S.A.R.N. might want to hold as hostages, after submitting them to suitable interrogation. A paid housekeeper, a friend of Jakubiez, was there to supervise the carrying out of the work and to guard the material stored there.

At another of the addresses found in Jakubiez's notebook, in the basement of a family pension in the rue de Ribera, a similar arrangement was found. A command post had been installed, with a secret telephone installation. Here the police seized mechanisms fitted with dry batteries and clock movements intended for the manufacture of time-bombs, twelve cases of thirty-two grenades each, half a hundredweight of melinite, twenty-eight pounds of cheddite, twenty-two fire crackers, fifty-seven detonators, sixteen revolvers, eight Schmeisser and nine Beretta tommy-guns, Hotchkiss anti-tank cartridges, silencers for deadening the noise of explosions, and an incendiary substance capable of fusing metals.

In a garage at 92b boulevard de Picpus, a masonry door concealed behind racks opened on to a store-room containing fifty Beretta automatic rifles, forty Schmeisser tommy-guns, eighty Mauser rifles, two French sub-machine-guns, 1924 type, some boxes of cartridges from Toledo and San Sebastian, twenty-six boxes of grenades and twenty-nine boxes each containing a Beretta rifle, a Schmeisser tommy-gun, a

sporting gun and some haversacks filled with cartridges. The two French sub-machine-guns found in this raid were among those stolen from the Laon barracks, a theft which *Gringoire* the following day had ascribed to working-class elements.

Over and above those on Jakubiez's list, a large number of other depots were discovered in Paris, notably on the boulevard des Invalides, the boulevard de Courcelles and the rue Saint-Lazare. Depots were also found in the suburbs and in the provinces, in the departments of the Eure, the Marne, the Allier and Puy-de-Dôme.

Meanwhile the opening of judicial proceedings and the measures that followed created panic in the ranks of the Cagoularde, some of whom hastily rid themselves of compromising stocks. In November and December 1937, eighteen cases of grenades were found abandoned in the Bois de Boulogne, forty-six cases on the main road at Brévannes, fifty cases at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, thirty cases at Férolles-Attilly, ten sub-machine-guns in the woods near Ville d'Avray and a time-bomb in the Avenue George V. Two Cagoularde were caught in the rue de Montreuil at Vincennes as they were carrying in their car forty Schmeisser tommy-guns, eight Beretta carbines and two machine-guns stolen from the fort at Saint-Denis.

In the River Rquère at Saint-Georges-sur-Allier were found ten packages of twenty bombs each. They were of extraordinary power and were made of metal tubes similar to those used by Méténier in his factory nearby. Seven other similar boxes were found in a garden belonging to Méténier, who had given strict instructions not to touch the shrubs under which they had been buried.

All the material seized was brought for testing to the workshops of the Villejuif laboratories. One day the entire stock exploded accidentally in the course of handling, killing fifteen people and damaging buildings for hundreds of yards around. Its destructive power was thus tragically demonstrated at cruel and irreparable cost.

According to Article 265 of the Criminal Code 'the formation of any association, no matter for what length of time or whatever the number of its members, with the aim of preparing or committing outrages against persons or property, constitutes a crime against the public peace'.

The criminal nature of such an association only disappears in law if, at its formation, the political idea envisaged excluded any criminal activity. But the political character and the criminal activity of the O.S.A.R.N. were clearly interdependent, as could be seen from an examination of the files headed: 'Working plan, research programme', seized at the headquarters of the Cagoule at 78 rue de Provence.

These files contained questionnaires and information under the following headings:

- (1) Information about the Communists.
- (2) Situation and details of electrical power stations, heat and light, Métro, gas plants, public transport.
- (3) Plan of the public water system.
- (4) Cartridge factories to be occupied in the Paris area.
- (5) Situation and armament of the barracks of the *Garde Républicaine* and the mobile guards.
- (6) Plans of the following Ministries: Air, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Education, Labour, Pensions, Trade, also the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and the Élysée.
- (7) Private residences of Ministers and under-Secretaries of State. Do they live there, or have they got accommodation at their ministries? What are their habits? How are they guarded?
- (8) What are the night staffs of the civil ministries? What are the most plausible excuses for getting in?
- (9) To what sort of person would access be easiest?
- (10) Is it possible to get into contact with any officer of the *Garde Républicaine* or mobile guards in sympathy with our cause?
- (11) Can one obtain uniforms in case of need?

These questionnaires were prepared by the head of the

Third Bureau of the General Staff of the O.S.A.R.N. in collaboration with Deloncle, and the documents seized showed that the programme had been carried out point by point. The corresponding replies included a plan of Léon Blum's flat and facsimiles of the signatures of all the ministers and of the President.

Another find was a list of twenty potential hostages with their correct addresses. These were to be imprisoned during the first phase of the revolution. On this list, dated 30 August 1936, there figured prominently and in order, the following names: Pierre Cot, Vincent Auriol, Jean Zay, Yvon Delbos, Paul Ramadier, Marius Moutet, Paul Faure and Roger Salengro. The Cagoulard Corrèze informed the staff in a special note that he had at his disposal all the keys of the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs and that he could easily get into the Minister's private office. The struggle against communism, about which Deloncle talked so much, hardly seemed to explain such goings on as these.

Several members of the Muette cell, under the orders of Filiol, further admitted to having been trained in the handling of explosives. The object, they said, was to be able, when the time came, to blow up the doors of ministries, bridges and railway points, etc., all actions clearly more offensive than defensive.

Eugène Deloncle himself, confessing to the conspiracy before the examining magistrate, maintained that his basic aim was to protect the country against communism. But he also made it clear that any government that was not strong enough to defeat a communist insurrection would not have the confidence of the O.S.A.R.N. and that he, Deloncle, would not lay down his arms till he had installed a government of his own choice.

It was certainly a novelty to hear conspirators maintaining that their preparations were only intended to protect the legal government against revolution and simultaneously claiming the right to overthrow any government if it did not

satisfy them and to impose their own authority. However that might be, the political motives of the O.S.A.R.N. were clearly shown both by its subversive schemes within the country and its collusion with agents abroad, and they were by no means devoid of those criminal intentions against the public peace which mark a criminal association. The murder of political adversaries, the execution of untrustworthy colleagues, the putting to death of any citizen who hindered the success of a Cagoulard mission, were indisputably crimes in common law and also formed part of their programme, as was clearly shown by the disappearances of Juif and Jean-Baptiste.

At a few months' interval, in the course of that same year, a series of further tragedies was to confirm the existence of the criminal association and to provide further illustrations of its activities.

Dimitri Navachine, legal adviser to a number of companies, and a distinguished economist, was engaged on behalf of his clients in actions against more than one industrial enterprise of pro-fascist tendencies. He was suspected of having discovered the secret of the financing of the Cagoule, which named him as a Bolshevik spy and decided on his liquidation. The execution squad was given its orders. It consisted of Filiol, Bouvyer, Tenaille and a fourth unidentified conspirator.

Inquiries showed the four that Navachine took a walk every morning in the neighbourhood of Auteuil. On 14 January 1937, Navachine left his house about seven in the morning. He had just entered an avenue which led towards the Bois de Boulogne, when a man walking in the opposite direction suddenly attacked him and knocked him down with a blow in the face. It was Filiol. While Navachine was trying to get up, his dog bit the legs of the assailant, who turned and shot the animal dead. He then returned to his victim and stabbed him with a dagger again and again until he finally collapsed.

It was all over in less than two minutes. There were no witnesses except the three confederates, who were posted a short distance away in case of need. The pistol used by Filiol was fitted with a silencer and nobody heard the shot. At the post-mortem, the rectangular marks of the sawn-off bayonet mounted on a knife handle, the favourite weapon of Filiol, the most bloodthirsty member of all the Cagoule, were found on Navachine's body.

Loetitia Toureaux, Italian by birth, was a cloakroom girl at a *bal musette* in the rue des Vertus. In her free time she worked for a private detective agency and, it seemed, on occasion for the Army Intelligence Service. She was a pretty girl and had been Jeantet's mistress and had discovered his secrets. But she talked too much to be safe and she too had to disappear.

On Monday, 17 May 1937, she spent an enjoyable afternoon at Nogent-sur-Marne. Crossing the Bois de Vincennes on her way back, she ran into Filiol, by chance as far as she knew, and he asked if he might accompany her. She knew Filiol well and accepted his offer willingly. He left her at the Vincennes Gate.

Three-quarters of an hour later, about five o'clock in the afternoon, the body of Loetitia Toureaux was found lying on a seat in a first-class compartment of the Métro near the Porte Dorée station. Sticking into the left side of the neck was a dagger with a rectangular blade.

Not long before the declaration of war, the most striking proof of the Cagoule's criminal activities was the murder of the Rosselli brothers.

Only Carlo Rosselli was on the Cagoule's list of victims, for his political activities, but the murderers did not hesitate to kill his brother Sabatino at the same time in order to make their getaway. They believed in giving value for money. The crime was the more horrible since the O.S.A.R.N. itself had no grudge against either of the brothers. It seems, on the contrary, to have been the *quid pro quo* of a bargain made

with its fascist collaborators who had helped with the execution of Juif at San Remo and covered the traces. What was that, after all, but an exchange of favours between friends who slap one another on the back and understand one another perfectly?

The double murder must have needed considerable preparation.

Carlo Rosselli, who had become Professor of Political Economy at Genoa at the age of twenty-six, was an active member of the Socialist Party and had fought strenuously against Mussolini and his fascists. Charged with responsibility for the escape of the Socialist leader Turati, he was sentenced first to imprisonment and then to deportation to the Lipari Islands. He in his turn escaped and reached France after a brief stay in Tunisia.

Rosselli had considerable private means in Paris and put some of his money into founding the Italian paper, *Justice and Liberty*. His activities had been resented by the fascist leaders in Italy, and one day they pointed him out to De-loncle as a man who should be liquidated.

When Mussolini sent an expeditionary force to Spain, Rosselli practised what he preached and went to Spain himself with some of his compatriots to join up with the republican forces. Wounded in the fighting, Rosselli returned to Paris in the spring of 1937 and decided to go to Bagnoles-de-l'Orne for a rest. His brother, Sabatino, a professor at the University of Florence, was to come and join him there for the season.

The two brothers booked rooms from the end of May at the Hotel Cordier. On 9 June they drove Madame Carlo Rosselli, who was returning to Paris, to the station at Alençon. On the way back, they took a side road that led to Bagnoles, for the pleasure of the drive. That evening they were awaited in vain at the Hotel Cordier.

The next day, 10 June, their car was found abandoned at the side of the road between Bouchard mill and the village of

Bruyères. The coachwork showed traces of blood and smoke. An attempt had been made to set fire to it by an incendiary device placed under the hood.

The bodies of Carlo and Sabatino Rosselli were not found until a day later, 11 June, in a coppice some way off. Carlo's body bore traces of four knife wounds. His brother, Sabatino, appeared to have put up a terrific fight against two assailants, for he must have been stabbed seventeen times, in the chest and back simultaneously.

The inquiry ran into difficulties from the start, as the first conclusions seemed to lead nowhere. The victims had been searched and their papers, as well as some of their money, had disappeared. But it soon became clear that theft had not been the main reason for the crime.

A young girl who had been cycling along the road on 9 June at about seven in the evening, approximately the time when the crime was taking place, saw two cars drawn up on the far side of the road. A Ford, belonging to the Rosselli brothers, which she recognized, had stopped behind another car painted black. Two men were standing nearby. On the road she noticed a large pool of blood.

The inquiry dragged out and showed signs of going on for ever, when a tip-off reached the Sûreté Nationale from one of its informers who said that the probable murderers were a certain Bouvyer and a former boxer named Huguet.

Picked up at Constantine, where he was doing his military service, Bouvyer admitted that he had a hand in the crime and gave details of the part he had played. Except for a few minor details, which were denied by his accomplices, he reconstructed the various phases of the tragedy from the beginning.

In January 1937, while he was looking for a job, he made the acquaintance of a certain André Tenaille, who engaged him to carry out inquiries and undertake jobs of shadowing for the benefit of a secret society about which, at that time, he knew nothing. In May Tenaille took him to a café in



Montparnasse and introduced him to Huguet. In the café Huguet pointed out a customer who was none other than Carlo Rosselli, and gave him his address.

On 29 May Tenaille gave Bouvyer four hundred francs and told him to go to Bagnoles to confirm that Carlo Rosselli was still there. Huguet carried out a counter-check. Both men confirmed that Carlo was staying at the Hotel Cordier and reported the fact to Tenaille.

Three days later there was a fresh check and a fresh confirmation. Carlo was still there and seemed to have no intention of leaving. The end of the story was near.

On 8 June, about nine in the evening, Tenaille picked Bouvyer up at a café in the Avenue Hoche and ordered him to leave the following morning by the first train for Bagnoles. He would be met at the station by a comrade called Fauran, who would bring him back to Paris by car the same day. (Fauran, a former member of the National Volunteers, had taken his oath to the O.S.A.R.N. only two days before.)

Everything took place as Tenaille had arranged. Fauran and Bouvyer lunched together at a restaurant near the station and then went to the Hotel Cordier for coffee. Bouvyer pointed out to Fauran, who did not know them, the two brothers Rosselli, who were sitting in the hall with Carlo's wife.

Bouvyer still did not know exactly what was required of him. All Fauran told him was that they were to stay together and that they had nothing to do but follow a car, which he would point out, and in which there would be some friends. So they left the hotel, Fauran driving slowly, and stopped at the outskirts of the town where the road led in the direction of Alençon.

After waiting half an hour they were overtaken by the Rosselli family's Ford, which was followed at a short distance by a Peugeot. There were four passengers in this last car, Puireux, Filiol, Jakubiez, and another man who was not at first recognized but who turned out to be Tenaille.

These last three were already known to be Deloncle's strong-arm men and were specialists of the execution squad.

Complying with the instructions he had received, Fauran followed the Peugeot and stopped alongside it in a square in Alençon to exchange a few words with its occupants.

At a given signal Fauran once again started off behind the Peugeot, which took the Coutennes road towards Bagnoles. After a short open stretch and a turn, Bouvyer and Fauran saw the Rossellis' Ford and the Peugeot drawn up at the side of the road, but it was the Peugeot which was now in front; it had probably driven the Rossellis' car off the road.

They heard a shot and saw one of the Rosselli brothers going towards the two passengers in the Peugeot. Then the three started to fight. Fauran did not wait any longer, Bouvyer said. He turned the car round at once and drove back to Paris.

It was all in Bouvyer's interests, of course, to play down his own responsibility in the tragedy, and perhaps that of Fauran and of Tenaille too. All the same, there seems little reason to doubt that from his first interrogation on, he gave a practically complete account of the crime in which he had taken part.

The court proceedings fully confirmed his account and further revealed that Jakubiez and Filiol had gone on ferociously stabbing the corpse of Sabatino Rosselli as it lay in a ditch. Filiol felt that the game was up; he was the first to make his getaway and was never caught. His accomplices were arrested before the case left the hands of the examining magistrate.

At the end of 1937 the O.S.A.R.N. had been in existence for two years. It had plenty of money, materials, arms and explosives. Its supporters were becoming more and more numerous. It was necessary to keep them in training by suitable exercises until the day of the great coup for which they were being prepared.

On the night of 28-29 August 1937, at about three in the morning a fire broke out in the hangars of the Toussus-le-Noble aerodrome and damaged four aircraft of American make. These planes were the property of the Society of Aerial Transport of 76 avenue des Champs-Élysées, whose director was believed to be in close touch with the Spanish Republican government. It was proved that the fire had been started by clockwork bombs, fragments of which were found on the site after the fire.

An inquiry revealed that some days earlier a group of sightseers had asked to visit the hangars and had persistently inquired the destination of the machines. Two days before the outrage, an unknown caller, who had pretended to be an officer from the Orly base, had tried to get information on the same subject over the telephone. The day before a man had presented himself at the guard-room accompanied by a woman, and had asked for permission to go into the camp on the pretext of looking for a mechanic who had insulted his wife.

The visitors had been none other than Fauran, Corrèze, Blot, Langlois, Tastmain and Filiol, that is to say the complete team of Eugène Deloncle's strong-arm men. Naturally enough, all of them denied it, but what they could not deny was the existence of documents seized at the headquarters in the rue de Provence which referred to the affair of Toussus-le-Noble. In one of these occurred the lines:

'We have been informed that the American planes destined for Spain and which have arrived at Toussus-le-Noble have now been uncrated. Assembly started yesterday, Thursday, 29 April 1937. Another plane, now at Havre, a Norton, is also being assembled by teams of experts. These planes are legally the property of a Franco-Belgian company at 76 avenue des Champs-Élysées. We have been assured that the guards who look after the hangars where the Vultee planes are stored have now been removed. This is the chance to pay them a visit.'

The presence of this note in the files of the O.S.A.R.N., the suspicious curiosity of Fauran, Filiol and their companions about the aerodrome the day before the fire, and the nature of the machines used to start the fire, all clearly showed that the Cagoule had a hand in the affair.

The communist *putsch*, the *raison d'être* of the O.S.A.R.N., its excuse for murder, arson, espionage and treason, was still no nearer. It was becoming impossible to mark time any longer. Three months had passed since the murder of the Rosselli brothers and mere training exercises were not good enough for Deloncle.

On 11 September 1937, two terrific explosions took place almost simultaneously at about ten o'clock in the evening in the Étoile district. They partially destroyed the premises of the General Confederation of French Employers in the rue de Presbourg, and the building of the Paris Region Metallurgical Industries in the rue Boissière.

In the rue de Presbourg, the concierge was wounded in his lodge and two policemen who were on duty in front of the building died under the ruins. In the rue Boissière, the concierges were not there and the building was not occupied at night, so there were no victims.

The concierge in the rue de Presbourg declared that about six in the evening a man wearing blue overalls and with a grey cap on his head had given him a small wooden box addressed to the President of the General Confederation of Employers, as coming from the textile industry. About 6.10 the same evening, the concierges in the rue Boissière were knocked up by a man carrying a similar box, which was to be given to the Director of the group of metallurgical industries.

The day after the incident, the *Echo de Paris*, the *Petit Journal*, the *Jour*, the *Journal des Débats*, the *Liberté* and the *Temps* went all out against Léon Blum and Marcel Cachin. Numerous traits were followed up amongst active supporters of the extreme left and in anarchist circles. A concerted howl

in the press accompanied these operations which, however, led to no result. But the direction in which the limelight had been turned gave every satisfaction to Eugène Deloncle, whose aims on one essential point had been attained. Till something better should turn up, he had at least brought off his 'warning shot'.

Meanwhile a series of searches which had been quietly ordered after the affair of the Swiss frontier, led the investigators to establish a link between the discovery of delayed-action incendiary devices at the home of a leading Cagou-lard and the objects found on the site of the destroyed buildings. At the same time secret and mostly anonymous reports were flowing in every day to the Sûreté, which examined them closely and neglected none of them. It was thus that it noted as a possible accomplice in the outrage a certain Locuty, founder of the group called 'The Children of Auvergne' at Clermont-Ferrand, an important branch of the Cagoule.

Inquiries showed, first of all, that Locuty had left his home for Paris the day before the outrage and had not returned till the following day. Furthermore, his description tallied closely with that of the man who had deposited the box in the rue de Presbourg. A chemical engineer, serious and hard-working, Locuty was regarded at Clermont-Ferrand as a good man, but a bit of a crank and a political firebrand. The suspicions against him were serious and time pressed. Without further ado, he was asked to give details of how he had spent his time in Paris during his visit there on the 11 and 12 September. Locuty was not only thunderstruck at being tracked down so quickly, he was tormented by remorse. He did not attempt to deny the charge and told the story of his tragic trip at once.

On 10 September he was summoned to Paris by telephone and told to go at ten o'clock the following morning to the Café de Presbourg, where he would meet a certain François. François turned out to be Méténier, a leading figure in the

O.S.A.R.N. Locuty knew him well, for he had lived for a long time at Clermont-Ferrand and frequently revisited it.

At the rendezvous Méténier was accompanied by Filiol. The three men had a drink, then went to the Restaurant Lucas-Carton in the Place de la Madeleine, where a young typist, Mlle Blondet, joined them.

After the meal, Méténier took Locuty to his house in the rue Georges-Ville, where two other comrades were waiting. One of them, Corre, a former Young Royalist, was also one of Deloncle's immediate assistants.

The three men told Locuty they were planning a major operation and asked if he would be willing to help them. When he agreed, he was taken to a cellar in the rue Ampère, which had been fitted up as a laboratory. They brought him cartridges, detonators, dry batteries, clock movements and various other materials that he asked for, in order to make the two powerful bombs that were needed for the operation.

All these preparations were carried out with the aid, or in the presence, of Méténier, Moreau de la Meuse, Filiol, Corre and Jean Macon, the caretaker. The job was finished at about half-past five. The two bombs were then placed in their boxes and, on the orders of Méténier, the contacts were set so that the explosions would take place about ten o'clock that evening.

A little before six o'clock, Méténier in a Talbot car took the boxes and the two men, Locuty and Macon. He dropped the first close to the rue Boissière and the second at the corner of the rue de Presbourg. Méténier's last advice to the hesitant Locuty was, 'Go there with your head up, man; don't look like a conspirator.'

His mission accomplished, Locuty went to the Gare de Lyon to dine and catch the nine o'clock train back to Clermont-Ferrand. He telephoned Méténier from the buffet to tell him that everything had gone well. The next day, out shooting with friends, he seemed uneasy and despondent.

To one of them, a certain Vaucard (whose name has already been mentioned in connection with the arms convoys) he told the whole story and added that it was a filthy job that Méténier had made him do.

The following week Méténier conveyed to Locuty through Vaucard that he would be well advised to keep his mouth shut; then he summoned him to Paris again. On Vaucard's advice, Locuty ignored this summons, which might well have proved fatal for him.

Despite all the details Locuty had given, Méténier, Moreau, Corre, Macon and their companions categorically denied having taken any part whatsoever in the outrages in the Étoile neighbourhood; they provided unverifiable explanations and carefully prepared false alibis.

However, Locuty's confession was checked point by point and everything fitted. The story of the trip, the description of the laboratory, the composition of the bombs, the appearance of the boxes, the circumstances of the lunch at Carton's, the presence of the secretary at the meal and a score of other material details could not have been guessed by Locuty, who had no interest in inventing them, and every bit of evidence went to confirm the truth of his confession.

Conceived in 1935 and organized in 1936, the O.S.A.R.N. only developed its criminal activities to their full extent in 1937. The court proceedings touched off by the two explosions practically put an end to its ephemeral existence. Seventy-two Cagoullards were sent to prison. A good number of their leaders and their accomplices, some of the most guilty, fled abroad where they had been able to make contacts that came in useful.

This time the actions of the Sûreté Nationale, the Préfecture and all the various police forces were understood and energetically supported by the Minister of the Interior, Marx Dormoy, who issued the following statement to the press on 24 November 1937:

'Nothing less than a conspiracy against the institutions of the Republic has been revealed.

'Investigations by the Sûreté Nationale and the Préfecture of Police, which have been going on for some weeks, have culminated for the moment in the seizure of a large quantity of war material, a great part of which came from abroad; tommy-guns, army rifles, sub-machine-guns, revolvers, grenades, cartridges, explosives, etc.

'The search carried out at the head office of the Maritime and Fluvial Mortgage Bank, 78 rue de Provence, whose Managing Director is M. Deloncle, engineer-consultant at the Penhoet shipyards, has shown that we are faced with a secret para-military organization conducted along military lines. It comprises a General Staff with four departments and a medical service.

'The organization of its forces into divisions, brigades, regiments and battalions indisputably shows that this body was aiming at civil war. Documents seized have proved that the culprits intended to substitute for the republican form of government, with which our people has freely endowed itself, a régime of dictatorship intended to precede a restoration of the monarchy.

'This seditious plan was prepared in the greatest detail. In the course of searches carried out, there have been discovered:

Equipment for the making of false identity papers;

Instructions for the transport of arms;

Information concerning the forces of public security in the Seine, Seine-et-Oise and Seine-et-Marne departments, with the names of the officers commanding each unit;

Notes concerning numerous officers and the equipment of regiments, and blank military forms stolen from army offices:

' A list of buildings with several exits;



An accurate plan of the Paris sewers, with charts of routes leading into the Chamber of Deputies;

Internal plans of buildings occupied by left-wing newspapers, and plans of the flats of socialist Deputies;

Plans for the commandeering of the buses and depots of greater Paris and the trucks of the Paris Transport Corporation, which were to be used as war material;

A plan to seize the arms stored at Mont Valérien.

'These plans have miscarried, thanks to the vigilance of the government, which has the confidence of the country. The institutions of the Republic have nothing to fear from the enterprises of sedition-mongers.

'The investigations which have already produced appreciable results are being untiringly pursued by officials who have shown themselves once again good servants of the Republican state.

'The culprits will be severely punished. There will be no need to have recourse to emergency measures, to do this; the laws of the Republic are sufficient to ensure its safety.

'The Government is confident in itself. It is well able to counter every kind of criminal activity directed against the Republic. It gives full assurance of this to French democracy.'

When he issued this forceful proclamation, Marx Dormoy was signing his own death warrant. The Cagoule was to take its vengeance a little later by murdering him under the protection of the Gestapo.

As in the happy days of 1934, the Young Royalists and the adherents of the Croix de Feu nevertheless felt at one with their comrades of the O.S.A.R.N. Forty-eight hours before the statement of the Minister of the Interior, Colonel de la Rocque published in a sheet devoted to his cause a short note of warning:

'Owners of side-arms or firearms, be on your guard

against stool-pigeons and expect house searches. They are in the fashion.'

The tone was ironical; but the men to whom the warning was addressed knew how to read between the lines.

Since 1934 the Colonel had not been wasting his time. His reputation had indeed been slightly tarnished by his polemics with André Tardieu, who had publicly denounced him for taking his share of the secret funds of the Ministry of the Interior. But he had kept his forces in hand and from time to time had made them carry out a few trial gallops at the expense of the authorities, whom he had covered with ridicule. One Monday, at Clermont-Ferrand, in the absence of the prefect, some strikers from the Michelin factories had entered and occupied the Préfecture for a whole day. Installed in the office of the principal private secretary, one of the leaders had telephoned to Colonel de la Rocque, using the military formula which he had himself used after the battle of 6 February: 'Objective attained'. The origin of this demonstration was not difficult to guess.

At Strasbourg in 1937, the Croix de Feu, which had now become the P.S.F., had misused the permission granted them to hold an indoor meeting and had secretly organized, under the leadership of the Colonel, and despite the prohibition of the prefect, a large and disorderly rally which swamped the police.

After the arrest of the Cagoulaards, Charles Maurras commented on the event in *L'Action Française* on 14 January 1938, and made his disappointment clear:

'When it came up against the terrorism of Hitler, the German state, faced with a super-German national terrorism, was well-disposed and complacent. But if they came up against any French national terrorism, the Briandist officials of our democratic republican state would be the most ferocious of adversaries. As regards France and Germany, therefore, the situation was reversed. What was easy there, and should have been beneficial, should have succeeded here

also, but on the contrary was fated to meet with the most enormous difficulties and a serious possibility of defeat had to be reckoned with.'

The 'Briandist officials' of the Sûreté and the Préfecture of Paris may for this once accept a compliment from M. Charles Maurras. They are proud of having contributed within the measure of their power to the holding in check of this 'French national terrorism'.

Despite the blow struck at the O.S.A.R.N., despite the terrible revelations that followed and that should have given all good citizens pause, the forces of reaction remained at the ready. They knew well enough that their revenge was near.

It is true, of course, that public opinion never realized the full meaning of these events and remained deaf to the warnings given by the newspapers which represented the thinking elements among the people. As for the other papers, the big circulation sheets, they had amused themselves by completely misrepresenting the story of the Cagoule, making it a laughing-stock and describing the whole affair as a comic opera conspiracy staged by the socialist government for its own political ends. Some of them even affected to poke fun at the official statements of the Ministries of Justice and the Interior and went so far as to deny the very existence of the Cagoule.

Its existence was, however, only too real and already gave a brief and frightening foretaste of the trials awaiting the French people under the Hitlero-fascist domination.

The proceedings opened in 1937 against Eugène Deloncle and his accomplices for forming an illegal organization and plotting against the security of the state, dragged laboriously out for two years. Some of the accused, who had made confessions supported by proofs, turned round and denied all that they had admitted and discovered invaluable alibis. Despite the serious nature of the charges, bail was widely allowed.

Exceptionally complicated because of the diversity of the

facts and the large number of the accused, the principal case gave rise to eighteen subsidiary cases. It ended, to all practical purposes, in July 1939, with the committal to the Paris Assizes of seventy-one of the accused, of whom a bare twenty were still in prison. Most of these, too, demanded bail on the declaration of war, in order to comply with their mobilization orders.

A great wind of indulgence blew upon the conspirators. If, by some oversight, a few still remained in French prisons at the moment of the capitulation, the German or Italian invaders would soon see to their release and rehabilitation.

On the eve of the First World War, M. Caillaux had deplored the weakness shown by the governments of 1914 towards the press and the politicians of the extreme right. On the eve of defeat in 1940, his warnings remained fiercely contemporary. But even the friends of Joseph Caillaux seemed to have forgotten them completely.

From the symbolic kitchen-knife of Charles Maurras to the machine-guns of Darnand and Jeantet, from the dagger-bayonet of Filiol to the clockwork bombs of Méténier, the gang of the fleur-de-lys would thus be able at last to take up the arms of which Marx Dormoy had deprived them and accede to their finest hour on the day of the defeat.

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## ‘Sublime Surprise’

AMONG those at the top at any rate, the conspirators of the O.S.A.R.N. and their friends were not ordinary criminals. They were intellectuals and savants. Some of them represented the best in French literary culture, mathematical, chemical and industrial science, medicine and art. They left the odd jobs to their strong-arm men; meantime they could work out at leisure a long-term plan which they were not going to give up.

To free a madman, a traitor or a hardened murderer, whatever his intellectual or social eminence, is to run the risk of being his victim again. The extraordinary clemency the government had just shown to the men who had sworn its overthrow proves either that it did not realize what they were after, or that it too had to some degree come under their pernicious influence. It would soon be paid back.

The *élite* of the O.S.A.R.N. answered the call-up in 1939 without the least misgivings and not a few joined the General Staffs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. Members scattered all through the military zones. Cagou-lards and Cagoulard sympathizers abounded in the intelligence services, particularly in Paris, Strasbourg, Belfort, Besançon, Lyons and in the forward areas. Their opinions had not changed and their attitude was the more disquieting since under the emergency regulations they now had at their disposal a police staff which they could use as they liked. It was an odd way to defend a country.

The Supreme Command of course was pursuing its own war policy; but it was a policy that did not always suit its

subordinates or the men who ran the big circulation press. When, for example, it wanted to support Benes and organize a Czechoslovak expeditionary force in France, it ran up against the opposition of a powerful weekly.

'The campaign against Czechoslovakia,' said General Maurin, 'was supported in France by a section of the press and by other publications. I drew the attention of the Army General Staff to the fact that certain articles in *Je suis partout* signed by French contributors were clearly based on documents supplied by foreign sources. The writers, who did not know what they were writing about, had left the trade-mark on the finished article. There could be no doubt that they got their material from abroad.'

As a result, the French general in command of the Czechoslovak camp at Agde in 1939 systematically persecuted the inmates. When General Maurin brought this up against him, he leapt to the defence of the patriots of *Je suis partout*, of which he was an avid reader. Perhaps the general in command at Agde and *Je suis partout* could have argued their case. But they were not the commander-in-chief and they were not the government.

The truth is that, on this little point, as on many others far more important, the deadly work of moral and national disintegration was going on almost unchecked.

When June 1940 saw the collapse of France under the German onslaught, the only emotion it aroused in the leading representatives of 'a hundred per cent nationalism' was a more than pleasurable surprise or, as Charles Maurras put it, a 'sublime surprise'. He and his admirers were hard put to it later on to justify this exclamation which must have sprung from the heart. There was no question, it was explained, of Maurras having gone back on his patriotism, as the malicious contended. Not a bit of it: here is the laborious interpretation of the thinking of the master given by M. André Thérive in his *Essay on Treason*:

'French Republicans have pretended to believe that

M. Charles Maurras, because he was a monarchist, called the disaster of 1940 a "sublime surprise". He would have been far more likely to say that the catastrophe was no surprise for him, for he had predicted that France would have to undergo it as a penalty for what he considered a disastrous régime and an insane policy. In his mind the "sublime surprise" can only have meant the chance France had of changing the régime and getting rid of democracy. That is just what the democrats had against him when they had him sentenced for treason and collusion with the enemy.<sup>1</sup>

As a defender of M. Charles Maurras, M. André Thérive proves a little too much. He only confirms what was already crystal clear, that the only thing that counted for Maurras was the collapse of the Republic. That for him was the first, the only, the 'sublime' surprise. It fulfilled the dearest dreams of the editor-in-chief of *L'Action Française*. As for the invasion, the occupation, the enslavement and the ruin of his country, they were mere secondary considerations. They were powerless to dim the sublime character of the first impression. The proof is that, when France came to be liberated, Maurras could not find a single phrase in all his rich vocabulary to express a similar ecstasy.

From June 1940 onwards, Maurras was to find himself in good company, alongside Marshal Pétain, for even if the Marshal did not express himself with such exuberance, if we may believe M. Léon Noël he thought the same.

'For several years, in any case since he had joined the Doumergue government in 1934, Pétain's political ambitions had been growing,' M. Noël says. 'He was making preparations to take power on the first occasion that offered and was keeping his eyes open for it. You remember, for example, the pamphlet by Gustave Hervé: "It's Pétain we need", which came out simultaneously with another by the same author in

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by the monarchist *Aspects de la France*, 7 December, 1951.

favour of Franco-German *rapprochement*. Pétain was in with all circles of the extreme right and the *Action Française*. It is true he had for long been looked on as a left-wing general; Paul Painlevé had appointed him Commander-in-Chief and Gaston Doumergue Minister of War, but he had taken an aversion to the Republic, its institutions and democratic society, and was dreaming of a complete change of régime. His scepticism and his pessimism have often been exposed; one of the best examples is that on the eve of the 1918 armistice, he gave his opinion in writing that the Germans would unquestionably reject the terms which it was intended to impose on them. The scepticism and the pessimism had increased with the years and had led Pétain to resign himself to the defeat. They also steeled him to turn to his own advantage this "sublime surprise", to use M. Maurras' abominable phrase, on the day when France finally found herself reeling under it.<sup>1</sup>

A good part of the inquiry into the O.S.A.R.N. before the invasion was carried out in the Clermont-Ferrand area when the first cases of arms-smuggling were discovered. The 'Children of Auvergne' had been a particularly active branch, to which Méténier, Locuty, Vauclard and Vandekerkove had belonged. It had many sympathizers among the leaders of local industry.

The investigations here had been carried out by Divisional Superintendent Buffet, head of the regional squad of the Criminal Investigation department. Buffet was a protégé of Pierre Laval who, in 1942, made him Commissioner of the local Sûreté. Buffet knew the whole Cagoule affair and its ramifications backwards, so when Laval became Pétain's Premier in 1940, he had all the information he needed about

<sup>1</sup> Statement by M. Léon Noël, the former Ambassador, before the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, quoted by *France-Soir*, 24 January, 1952.



the men who surrounded the Head of State. He knew them, indeed, a little too well for their liking, which is why he was thrown overboard that December. When the Germans restored him to power, he did his best to tack to the prevailing winds.

Throughout the whole of the occupation, in a welter of ambitions and intrigues, the fate of the French people ultimately depended on two men; Pétain, secretly inspired by his father confessor, Charles Maurras, and Pierre Laval, as unloved as he was alone. From a worm's eye view the spectacle was not edifying. For the moment let us keep to this level and return to the police.

This was also an army, an army whose strength had till then been all too small. It was now rapidly doubled, and room was found, particularly in the higher ranks, for plenty of unemployed soldiers and sailors. Other soldiers, including not a few Cagoulaards, responded to the appeal of General de Gaulle and escaped to England or North Africa, with the stream of deputies, officials and good Frenchmen of all creeds and professions who would not accept defeat. For there is no question that many people strayed into the ranks of the O.S.A.R.N. in complete good faith and never realized its true political aims or its anti-national creed.

From the end of June, under the terms of the armistice, a rigid frontier divided continental France into two unequal zones. The northern zone was under German occupation; the southern zone, theoretically free, was administered by the new government from the provincial capital of Vichy. In fact, nothing of any importance could be done in either zone without the consent of the occupation authorities.

In the northern zone, Eugène Deloncle rallied some of his supporters in a short-lived Social Revolutionary Movement, which merged in February 1941 into Marcel Déat's National Popular Rally. Doriot was at its head, supported by Bucard of the Francist movement, Filiol and a few others, and the N.P.R. later helped to organize the 'French' League of Volun-

teers and the 'French' S.S unit which fought on the Russian front.

The two zones were swarming with groups and sub-groups, often in violent competition, and all stemming more or less from the disbanded leagues and parties, or from the Cagoule. Their activities, like those of the General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs, were more of a police than of a political nature. All of them claimed to be anti-Semitic, anti-communist, anti-masonic and anti-Gaullist and were tolerated, if not encouraged, by the German authorities.

In the southern zone, the taking over of the administration and the police raised some thorny problems. In the thick of the disaster, with everything in complete confusion, the *de facto* government found itself faced with a colossal machine of which it understood neither the structure nor the workings nor the power, but which it intended to adapt to its new ideas.

Nothing practical could be done without the help of the former police force. But its officers were under-dogs from the start and the notion of a normal police force little by little disappeared, to be replaced by a series of improvisations, inspired in turn by amateur whims and partisan combativeness. Thus very early on a new body was formed, called the Intelligence and Research Centre, or C.I.E., whose job was to supervise the activities of the police on behalf of Pétain's private secretariat. Though the chief of the C.I.E. was supposed to come under the Commissioner of the Sûreté Nationale, he soon asserted his authority over him.

Vichy rumour had it that the innovation was due to Alibert, Pétain's Minister of Justice, and not to the Minister of the Interior, Peyrouton. To run the C.I.E., Alibert first thought of Méténier. But Méténier's name had appeared in the press a little too often over the Étoile outrages less than three years before. And when Méténier was asked, he said he intended to collaborate openly with the Germans and to keep his hands free. Alibert's choice finally fell on a man who was less showy but had better political contacts and was regarded

as more reliable from a national viewpoint, Colonel Georges Groussard. Méténier agreed to serve under him, on condition that he retained a certain independence of action.

The names of Alibert, Groussard and Méténier, with their registered numbers, their photos and their addresses, had all figured prominently in the register of active members of the Cagoule, which had been seized in 1938 at the headquarters in the rue de Provence. It is therefore superfluous to dwell on the views which in 1940 influenced the decisions of the Pétain cabinet and the choice of men called upon to serve under it.

At Méténier's request, Commander Labat of the Naval General Staff was appointed second in command to Colonel Groussard. Labat's name did not figure, like those of the others, in the register of the O.S.A.R.N., though that was no proof that he did not belong to it. But he had the right kind of record. He had been a specialist in political intelligence and had worked with Eugène Deloncle in the past. In peacetime, when he had served as Chief of Naval Intelligence in Toulon, he had been noteworthy for his surveillance of the town's masonic lodges. Finally, Colonel Groussard recruited Dr Martin, the former Chief of the Cagoule intelligence and an ex-leaguer of the *Action Française*.

The activities of the C.I.E. were limited to the southern zone. With a few rare exceptions, the departmental and regional chiefs were all former Cagoulards or young Royalists. The best known were Vandekerkove, de Bernonville, Clémoz and Dégans. It was as regional chief of the C.I.E. that Darnand started his career as a police officer.

The formation of the Intelligence and Research Centre (C.I.E.) therefore meant the almost complete regrouping on an official basis of the men who in 1938 had made up the Hitlero-fascist 'gang' of the Cagoule. This was certainly not what the republican government had intended when it had pardoned them. Now they were themselves masters of an absolute power and were to use it in a very different fashion.

From the first weeks of the occupation, the Vichy government set this special police force searching for people suspected of hostility to collaboration. It made its purpose quite clear in an interesting set of instructions, which became widely known later on through the resistance groups. Here are a few extracts :

'The Intelligence and Research Centre is an organization created to defend the person and the work of Marshal Pétain, under the orders of a chief appointed by him, Colonel Grousard, Inspector-General of the Sûreté Nationale.

'In view of the importance of this task and the gravity of the present circumstances, every member of the C.I.E. must take an oath of absolute loyalty to the Marshal and of unquestioning obedience to Colonel Grousard.

'The main task of the C.I.E. is to ensure the peace of the country by observing and checking all anti-national intrigues ; firstly, those of the international extremists ; secondly, those of autonomist and foreign agents ; and thirdly, those of opponents of the new régime and of persons previously members of secret societies now dissolved.

'It must also wage a constant propaganda campaign against the dissemination of the ideas of these three classes of enemies.

'Every member of the C.I.E. must turn in intelligence reports. This includes members of the protection squads, who should be instructed to this effect by their local commanders. Members of the protection squads must win the confidence of patriots and get them to give information on the subject of anti-national activities, with sufficient tact not to lay them open to the charge of being informers.

'Directives for research, from 20 October, 1940, onwards :

(1) Activities of the Communist Party : have any former chiefs, party members, former deputies or elected representatives resumed their activities, and where? What are their objectives, their orders, their arguments, their slogans?

(2) The political opposition : before any inquiry is made into

a specific centre of political opposition heads of the intelligence networks must make an accurate return for each district in their region of political figures who have recently been active or might become so; present or past Senators, Deputies, local councillors, mayors. They will make short and accurate notes on each, specifying what political party they belonged to and what are their more important political connections.

(3) Freemasons: the fact of having belonged to the Freemasons, if it has not been declared, is an offence which in the case of an official may have the most serious consequences. Thus every head of a regional network must recruit informers from former members of the disbanded secret societies, and must search for lodge registers and such other masonic publications as will allow him to confirm the Masonic affiliations of any suspect. In default of this, he must collect and collate the evidence of "brothers" who were in the lodges with suspects.'

There could be no mistaking what this document meant. It was the catechism of the charlatans, the narks, the murderers and the traitors of 'a hundred per cent nationalism'. Any reader who has not understood from the preceding pages what a political police force really amounts to has only to read this programme to see the slime in which it was born. We were already squelching in it in 1940 and were to be up to the neck in it for four long years. And when they were consulted by the Cagoule, Dr Knochen of the Gestapo and Dr Nosek were kind enough to express their satisfaction and to approve the aims of the C.I.E. in the name of the occupation authorities.

Whether they belonged to the uniformed protection squads or to the intelligence branch, the men who made up the bulk of the C.I.E. strength had been recruited in the same way as the officers and were worthy of their leaders. They included a number of habitual criminals and specialists in violence who were quick to give proof of their dangerous abilities.

The C.I.E. was the refuge of the underworld in all its forms.

On 13 December 1940, Pétain, under the influence of Alibert, decided to remove Laval from the Government and the protection squads were given the removal assignment. Their job was to arrest the Premier, to take him under escort to Châteldon and to keep him under house arrest there until further notice. Colonel Groussard was put in charge of the expedition, and he carried it out like a soldier, with a large body of police, who surrounded the Hotel du Parc as if they were taking a fortified position by assault.

But this feat had gone a little too far and fell foul of German political views. It also aroused some uneasiness among members of Pétain's entourage and, in January 1941, it led to the dissolution of the Intelligence and Research Centre.

Officially, the C.I.E. no longer had any budget. Colonel Groussard resigned as Inspector-General of the Sûreté Nationale; he had seen the error of his ways and turned to saner ideas of patriotism. The protection squads hid their uniforms and their tommy-guns. The intelligence services changed their label. But the greater part of the C.I.E. forces remained at the ready.

Officially, the C.I.E. was being liquidated. In fact, it was to linger on for three months more, thanks to big contributions from the secret funds which filled the gap caused by the overnight suppression of its budget. Once this period of respite was over its officers, forces, regional organization, orders and methods appeared openly in four new bodies.

The first of these was the Anti-Communist Police (S.P.A.C.), formerly a department of the C.I.E., which retained its original head, Detmar. The second was the Secret Societies department, which combined the former anti-Masonic sections, which were originally commanded by Marquis-Rivière in the northern zone and Major Labat in the south; the overall command now went to Bernard Fay,

Director of the National Library. Thirdly, the *Amicales de France*, formerly the *Amicales Agnely*, with headquarters at Marseilles, under Jeantet and Darnand, took over the propaganda work of the C.I.E. Finally, the intelligence services proper remained under the control of Dr Martin, who was a foundation member of the *Action Française*.

There were those who argued after the war that the C.I.E. had been conceived and organized by the Minister of the Interior, Peyrouton, in agreement with General Huntziger, the Minister of War, with the aim of providing cover for a counter-espionage service and of getting together under the guise of a civilian department a group of regular soldiers who would form the nucleus of a Resistance army. A simple reading of the Instructions quoted above, which were rigorously applied from 1940 onwards, makes one wonder what could have been the practical value of such a double game, if it ever existed.

Ideas proliferated around Marshal Pétain, and everyone had his own views on the best way to run the police. Dr Ménétrel, at once doctor, confidant and private secretary to the Marshal, is credited with having hatched a plan for a secret police force which would prepare a *coup d'état* for the restoration of the monarchy. The operation was to take place under the protection of the occupation forces and, when liberation came, the new force would have the job of dealing with the disorders which a change in the régime would undoubtedly set off. It was to disguise itself as a political movement, to be called 'The Team', the leadership of which would be entrusted to Duge de Bernonville.

De Bernonville, like his friends, had been through the *Action Française* and the Cagoule mill. In the O.S.A.R.N. he had been Chief of the First Section of the Paris region. Arrested in January 1938 and released on bail in the same year, he had gone to Vichy to place himself at the disposal of Colonel Groussard.

As head of the Protection Squads in the Lyons region, he

was at a loose end after the dissolution of the C.I.E., and in 1941 he entered the General Commissariat for Jewish Affairs. No one could be better qualified to carry out Dr Ménétrel's plans.

Recruiting for 'The Team' was to be carried out among former members of the *Action Française*, the *Solidarité Française*, the *Amicales de France* and the followers of the so-called 'national' parties—those of 6 February 1934—with such help as might be needed from the professional police. Its headquarters were in Paris in the rue Gôdot-de-Mauroy. Its men were organized in five-man squads with a pyramidical command structure. A central team would also function at Vichy.

After Ménétrel and de Bernonville, the leading figure in the organization was a former journalist named Richard, an assistant superintendent at the Sûreté Nationale, who had been posted to the S.P.A.C. in 1941. Richard was a former agent of the intelligence service of the *Action Française*.

The leaders of 'The Team' were planning for a strength of two hundred thousand men. They had set their sights too high and never even approached this figure, though Richard claimed that in 1942 he had five thousand recruits in the Paris region alone. So the project foundered, but though Ménétrel retired, Bernonville declared that he still remained at the service of the monarchy when the hour should strike. Meantime he used Admiral Platon's influence to get permission from the Germans to form 'commandos' to fight communism. The idea can hardly be called a brilliant one, but it none the less enabled Bernonville to recruit several hundred young men, whose training he supervised with the help of Major Betz of the Germany Army. He also placed himself at the disposal of Abel Bonnard, whom he helped with other similar projects.

It was becoming more and more obvious to the champions of 'a hundred per cent nationalism' that the German victory was their victory too, and their chief idea was to take the maximum advantage of it. They combined ser-



vility towards the occupants with paeans of praise in their papers for the still recent revolutionary activity of the Cagoule, and they even dreamed of getting together again in a sort of veterans' organization.<sup>1</sup>

After the liberation a scheme for the formation of an 'Association of Former Political Prisoners known as Cagoulards', was found in one of Eugène Deloncle's three Paris flats. A circular letter drafted by Deloncle to introduce this scheme to his friends says: 'It is unnecessary to dilate on the aims of this association\* and the less said about them the better.' In the same letter he suggests the names of Crespin, Proust, Tenaille, Pozzo di Borgo, de Bernonville and Darnand as founder members.

Article 2 of the rules of the proposed association says innocently that 'the aim of the association is to promote friendly relations among its members and to provide assistance for such as may be in need of it.'

Article 5 lays down that active membership is open to such persons as can claim that they have been former nationalist political prisoners, known as Cagoulards. Provision is also made for the admission of sympathizers, benefactors, and donors.

A conspirator to the last, Eugène Deloncle was to die a violent death in 1943, the association still unborn. One day four plain-clothes Gestapo men forced their way into his house to ask for an explanation of certain of his schemes. He thought he had to do with 'terrorists' come to execute him, and made to defend himself. The Germans shot him down with a burst from a tommy-gun.

The same fate awaited all these schemes and dreams and

<sup>1</sup> 'There are people who are astonished to hear our super-nationalists who want, so they say, France for the French, howling: "Long live Mussolini! Long live Hitler!" This attitude is, however, traditional. The ultra-patriots, for the last century and a half, have always preferred foreign governments to their own.' —Jean Galtier-Boissière, *Le Canard Enchaîné*: 6 April, 1936.

long-term police plans, whether they originated with Deloncle or de Bernonville, Audibert or Ménétrél, Platon or Bonnard, or some other interpreter of the inspired thinking of M. Charles Maurras. Events had doomed them. If they were to succeed, they required a certain minimum of preparation and governmental stability which international developments were never to grant them. Moreover, they aroused a deep-rooted hostility among the people.

The two jobs which the government of the day had to do and did do were to reconstruct and adapt the machinery of a police force which was entirely in the hands of the central administration and to co-ordinate the growing forces of the French Legion of ex-Servicemen, with a view to their use as shock troops inside the country. In the end, it was Darnand who had the last word, in the name of 'collaboration'.

The brief life of the Intelligence and Research Centre in 1940 marked a first step towards the adaptation of the police to the exigencies of the new French State and the occupation authorities. This creation was the work of the Cagoulard soldiers who were the first to rally round Pétain. The real wartime reform of the Sûreté Nationale, promulgated on 23 April 1941 by Admiral Darlan, as Minister of the Interior, was largely the work of sailors. Its chief features were the extension and rapid acceleration of the measures of state control of municipal police forces started in 1934, the creation of regional intendants, chosen mostly from the army and the administrative branches of the police, and finally the formation of a National Police School, which was placed under the command of an admiral.

The most dangerous innovation concerned the duties of the regional intendants. A case could just about be made out for them, as it could for the provisional general secretaries of the Liberation period, on the administrative and disciplinary level. But the interposition of a senior official between the local and departmental authorities on one hand and the

prefect on the other, and between the Criminal Investigation department and the Public Prosecutor's office, tended to sanction the existence of an irresponsible third power, neither administrative nor judicial, which opened the way towards arbitrary power. An institution of this kind is only conceivable under a totalitarian régime or during a short period of emergency.

With all due reserve on this point and on the manner in which it was applied, the reform of 1941, like that of 1934, marked a big step forward in the organization of the French police in general and the Sûreté Nationale in particular.

It placed the whole police administration on a higher level in the administrative hierarchy and endowed it at long last with the financial resources it needed to carry out its duty of protecting society. Once and for all it lifted the Sûreté Générale out of its penury and out of its rut. It turned it into a solid and workmanlike instrument which, with the minimum of changes, was able to face up to the tasks which confronted it when freedom was restored.

The French Legion of ex-Servicemen, which must not be confused with the Legion of French Volunteers for the Eastern Front (L.V.F.) started off as an ostensibly peaceful body. It was made up of veterans of the 1914-18 War who, in 1941, were asked no more than to take an oath of loyalty to Pétain. In 1942 it gave birth to the Legionary Police Service (S.O.L.) divided into squads whose job was to see to the organization and policing of the big departmental and regional rallies in the southern zone. The members of the S.O.L. were chosen from among the youngest and most bellicose of the Legionaries.

The Militia, which was set up by a law of 30 January 1943, absorbed the S.O.L. lock, stock and barrel. Darnand took command of it and organized it at first in the southern zone, where it soon reached a strength of 30,000 men. With the help of General Oberg, head of the S.S., he then extended

his authority to the northern zone. Simultaneously, by way of a symbolic gesture, he joined the S.S. and, wearing German uniform, took an oath of loyalty to the Fuehrer.

The Militia was an armed and militarized police force designed to compensate for the unreliability of the regular police, who were considered as a body to be untrustworthy, and to take the offensive against the Resistance forces. At its peak, its strength reached 50,000 men. Its budget rose from 60 million francs in 1943 to 220 millions in 1944.

Finally, in January 1944, the Vichy government created the General Secretariat for the Maintenance of Order, a sort of Ministry of the Police, which united and controlled all the various police forces and departments. Darnand was appointed Secretary-General for the Maintenance of Order, and he now had at his disposal three main types of hardened combat troops to lead against his enemies, the rebels and the men of the maquis. First there were the Militia, his private army which he had created in his own image. Then there were the Sûreté Nationale and its mobile reserve groups under the regional police intendants who, in April 1944, became intendants for the Maintenance of Order. Finally there was the Department for the suppression of anti-national activities (S.R.M.A.N.) whose central office was no more than the former Anti-Communist department (S.P.A.C.) created by Colonel Groussard. The Secret Societies Department and the Commissariat for Jewish Affairs were mainly concerned with keeping the German deportation camps filled, but the fact that their job was of a more administrative character than that of the combat formations, did not make them any less murderous.

The S.P.A.C., it will be recalled, was a mobile squad whose original strength did not amount to more than two superintendents and seventy men, recruited partly from the Préfecture of Police and the State Police and topped up from the so-called 'national' groups. After the departure of Pucheu for Algiers in 1942, the S.P.A.C. changed its name and be-

came the S.R.M.A.N. It was the same firm with a different label and a considerably strengthened personnel. Detmar, former assistant of Doriot, remained its head with the rank of police intendant. In 1944 Darnand attached some units of the Militia to it, partly to take part in joint operations and partly to supervise the execution of his own orders.

With the backing of Pétain, Laval and Gabolde, the new Secretary-General for the Maintenance of Order rushed through the establishment of courts-martial.

Article 6 of the Law of 15 April 1944, stipulated that members of the police forces and all bodies charged with the maintenance of public order were bound to communicate to officials of the Maintenance of Order any information asked of them. In a circular dated 25 April 1944, Darnand lays down the methods of collaboration which he intended to establish with the German authorities:

'In the event of the invasion armies—that is to say, in Darnand's view, in the event of a French army invading France—'landing airborne units or dropping parachutists in the interior of the country, the forces of the Maintenance of Order must regard these elements as disturbers of the peace. They will inform the nearest German units without delay. They will try to neutralize these elements, whatever may be the character of the invaders or the aims which they profess. In no case may the forces of the Maintenance of Order give members of the invading armies any information concerning the German forces or their armaments.'

Dégans, whom Darnand had appointed head of the General Intelligence department of the National Police, fell into step with his chief and passed on his instructions to the special superintendents:

'In view of the impossibility of discriminating in practice between the various organizations of the maquis, I have the honour to state that, in accordance with present instructions, all information collected about any dissident organization whatsoever must be given to the German authorities.'

The Chief of the Criminal Police, Felix Buffet, the former divisional superintendent who had carried out the inquiry into the Cagoule affair at Clermont-Ferrand, was blinded up to the last moment by the trust and admiration he felt for his countryman Pierre Laval. He knew everything there was to be known about the Locutys, the Météniers and the other assistants of Darnand. Yet here is the stirring final appeal issued to his men:

‘Public order is being increasingly threatened and criminals masquerading under political or patriotic labels are increasingly indulging in brutal and cruel attacks on the persons and property of the peaceful population. Nothing can justify homicidal violence. Nothing can justify the murder of the defenceless.

‘As a regular police officer like yourselves, I guarantee all of you who remain loyal complete security for yourselves and your families. As a regular police officer I tell you: Do your duty and you will have nothing to fear.’

The shock troops of the Maintenance of Order—a German order on French soil—those valiant soldiers of the army of the collaboration, had not waited to be organized into large-scale units under the command of Darnand to show their traditional mettle. The summary executions of Duchamp, of Juif and of Loetitia Toureaux, the foul murder of Navachine and the liquidation of the Rosselli brothers for the benefit of Mussolini, the bomb outrages in the Étoile quarter, had cost them no more than a few weeks in prison and they were burning to take up their favourite pastime again.

From the end of 1940 on, in Paris and in Vichy, there was a rash of bomb outrages at synagogues, masonic temples and commercial offices occupied by Jews. Communists, or people who passed for communists, were dealt with individually. Alphonse Rosenthal, the well-known diamond broker, was ‘shot while trying to escape’ in a passage at the Porte Maillot Métro by three men who had been ordered to take

him to a concentration camp: Antoinette Masse, known as Tonia, a former member of the Rexist party of Léon Degrelle, and secretary to Eugène Deloncle at the M.S.R., had become the mistress of the murderer Fauran. But she disagreed on politics with both men and she talked too much. She disappeared in 1941 and her corpse, neatly tied up and weighted, was found in the Seine near the Marly dam. A few days earlier she had been invited by her employer to a picnic at Maisons-Lafitte, and while she was still digesting a good dinner well washed down with wine, she had been knocked out from behind with a leaden cosh and then strangled. But the real master-stroke of the early years of the occupation, where the 'Cagoule specialists once again showed their mettle, was the murder of the former Minister of the Interior who had dared to pick up their gauntlet in 1938. Just as they had never forgiven Roger Salengro for disbanding the leagues, they had made up their minds to settle accounts with Marx Dormoy. They had another grudge against him too. Darnand considered him responsible for the disappearance of General Dusseigneur, who had died in 1939 after some months of detention in the previous year.

Arrested in 1940 on the order of Marshal Pétain, and interned at the Pellevoisin camp, Marx Dormoy was transferred in 1941 to Montelimar, where he was put under forced residence. In this condition of semi-liberty he might escape and once more become a danger to the men who had long determined on his elimination. It was therefore decided to speed things up and kill him without delay. On the instigation of Eugène Deloncle an expedition was organized, with a well-tried decoy technique.

A young woman of the name of Annie Muraille, who had from time to time acted minor parts in a company of Marguerite Moreno's, was sent to Montelimar to spy out the land, and stayed at the Hotel du Relais de l'Empereur, where the former minister was living. Her mission was to entice him to a quiet place where he could either be kid-

napped or killed on the spot. The seduction game having failed to work, Annie Muraille contented herself with making detailed notes of the habits of her future victim. She then left the hotel, but came back a few days later, on 25 June 1941 and resumed her observation.

On her return she was accompanied by three persons with suitcases who stayed at a nearby hotel. In one of the suitcases was a powerful time-bomb. When the moment came, they sent Annie Muraille an enormous bouquet of flowers in which the bomb had been carefully concealed. Following her instructions, she went to Dormoy's room at a time when she knew that he would be having dinner and hid the bomb under the mattress in the upper half of his bed. The clockwork mechanism was a silent one, and was set for twelve o'clock. Punctually at midnight the bomb exploded with an enormous detonation. The body of the victim, decapitated and blown to shreds was hurled out of the bed. Blood and brains splattered walls and ceiling.

The four murderers disappeared. Though they were identified and arrested shortly afterwards by the Lyons mobile squad, they were liberated by force a little later by a detachment of German troops, on the orders of Captain Gessler of the Vichy Gestapo. The Public Prosecutor and the Director of the prison both protested violently but to no avail. As for Annie Muraille, she was taken on as a spy by Dr Nosek's department.

Right through the occupation, individual murders like this were going on under the protection of the Germans, with similar cruelty and in the same sort of setting. Maurice Sarraut, Jean Zay and Georges Mandel were one after the other to join the list of eminent victims. Like the murder of Dormoy in 1941, the murder of Georges Mandel seems to have been planned in advance. On 25 July 1944 *Je suis partout* published a violent attack on Mandel in six or seven burning paragraphs, the last of which conveyed a threat which had been already carried out. After retracing in his



fashion the political career of the former minister, the writer concluded:

'Such is the man whom the Jewish powers would like once more to impose upon France. But they never will impose him.'

The 'Jewish powers' were all the less in a position to impose M. Mandel, since at the time of the article the unfortunate man was already dead. He had been murdered by the militiamen who were escorting him, just as Jean Zay was to be and just as Alphonse Rosenthal had been in 1941 in the passage at the Porte Maillot. The execution had preceded the warning. It is true that in July, 1944 communications between units of the Militia were not as good as they had been.

The record of this blood-bath did not stop short, unfortunately, at a handful of well-known crimes. It extended as long as the occupation lasted, to all the provinces of France, and an entire reconstruction of its activities would fill several volumes. Not a few of these isolated reprisals were stamped by the purest Cagoulard technique, but perhaps the best examples are those carried out in the Saône-et-Loire department shortly before the liberation, following the death of Philippe Henriot.

The news that Philippe Henriot had been killed reached the Macon militia the same day about one o'clock in the afternoon. Beside themselves with rage, the militiamen at headquarters made up seven teams of three men each and scattered through the town, armed with revolvers and tommy-guns. They had been given advance instructions by their commander, a certain Mathes, to avenge any such incident by killing a certain number of people reputed to be hostile to collaboration.

At half-past two that afternoon one team appeared at the Préfecture and demanded to see M. Papet, the principal private secretary, an exemplary official and the father of five children. Since M. Papet was some time appearing, a militia-

man went to his office, showed him a summons and told him to come at once. After a few moments hesitation, M. Papet followed; in the street, the militiaman forced M. Papet to walk in front and about two hundred yards from the Préfecture shot him down from behind without a word of explanation.

At 2.40 p.m., another team appeared at the demobilization centre and demanded to see the Commanding Officer, Captain Bouquet. The three militiamen accompanied him into his office. From outside, the sound of a lively dispute was heard, soon cut short by a burst of firing. The three men left, their tommy-guns still smoking, and the body of Captain Bouquet lay stretched on the floor.

At 3.30, the third team forced its way into the house of M. Bouvet, a master at the technical school. Received by Mme Bouvet, the militiamen demanded to see the professor, who appeared as soon as he heard the voices and made as if to go to his office to look for the identity papers they were asking for. No sooner had he turned his back than he was shot down point blank before the eyes of his horrified wife.

About the same time the fourth team forced their way into the office of Maître Souriau. In the absence of the notary, his son received them. When the father failed to appear after they had waited half an hour, the militiamen shot the son instead, before the eyes of his mother.

Also at about three o'clock, the fifth team, one of whose members was a doctor, entered the first-floor home of Michel Dick, a working brazier. The three men shut his wife up in another room and then killed her husband with a shot in the neck. Whether his conscience pricked him or whether he was afraid that he had bungled the job, one militiaman who had already reached the ground floor went back to the room and finished his victim off with a shot in the heart.

Finally, that same evening, a militiaman on guard duty at the headquarters on the Quai Lamartine, saw in the street two young students of the Cluny School of Arts and

Crafts, Josserand and Rigollet, whom he suspected of being in touch with a Maquis group. He arrested them, wrung a confession out of them, took them in a car to the left bank of the Saône and there shot them down with a tommy-gun, with the help of three other militiamen. That made in all seven murders in a single day, not counting that of Dr Israel who had been killed earlier at his own house in similar circumstances. And such of the teams as had not been able to run down the people they had been told off to kill, or other victims to take their place, relieved their feelings by looting and other acts of banditry.

On the pressing intervention of the Prefect, two militiamen thought to be ringleaders in the massacre were arrested at Lyons. But there was no question of a court-martial for them. Committed to the Saint Paul prison in July, they were set free in August on de Bernonville's orders and it was not until after the liberation that they paid the price of their crimes.

The Germans occupied the southern zone of France on 11 November 1942 and immediately introduced, through the Vichy government, the conscription of labour for service in Germany. Many young people refused to submit, left their homes and took refuge in the countryside or in the mountains, where they organized themselves in armed groups. That was how the winter of 1942-3 saw the beginnings of the army of the Maquis which was later to link up with the allied forces when they landed and to hasten the Germans' retreat.

The same period also saw the beginnings of the mass round-ups, which started at Nantes in 1942 over the affair of the so-called 'Red Spaniards' and resulted in fifty arrests. A second operation, that of the 'Martyrs of Chateaubriant', was set going by the murder of an examining magistrate, Judge Le Bras, and ended with the execution of thirty Frenchmen and the deportation of two hundred others, a number of whom died in captivity. Mass round-ups were carried out region by region, on information from the in-

telligence department or on the demand of the occupation authorities. The gendarmes, the local and regional police forces and the mobile reserve groups were required to give a hand to the Militia, the S.P.A.C. and the German troops, if these were called up to help.

After the Nantes affair, the most bloodthirsty of these operations were those at Orléans, Chartres, Nevers, Rennes and in the Haute-Savoie department. The Orléans round-up started with the arrest in March 1943 of a resistance man called Jenot. A detachment of the S.P.A.C. led by Superintendent Fourcade, an assistant of Detmar, was told to get to work on the papers seized on the arrested man. They set about interrogating Jenot by methods which can be guessed; under the torture he named seventeen of his comrades and they, like him, were condemned to death and shot. At Chartres in November, it was the Germans who arrested a group of resistance men and handed them over to a regional squad of the mobile police for interrogation. The police could not get the prisoners to talk, so the S.P.A.C. were called in and Detmar and Fourcade came down and took personal charge of the interrogation. Thirty-one arrests took place and they were followed by thirty-one executions. A similar operation carried out at Nevers about the same time resulted in the arrest of twenty-five members of the resistance, of whom eleven were condemned to death and the fourteen others deported.

Two big round-ups were also organized in Brittany. The first was due to information supplied by a former Communist Party worker who had been arrested earlier and was subsequently released to act as an informer for the Militia. It was carried out at Rennes by the Gestapo, assisted by a squad of the S.P.A.C. and some officers from the mobile sections. Fifty men were arrested and committed to Vitre and then deported to Germany. The second took place from May to July 1944 and ended just before the liberation. This time it was no mere anti-communist drive. The S.P.A.C. and strong

forces of the Militia were after the resistance as a whole. The arrests struck not only at the F.F.I. and the F.T.P., who had taken to the field, but at anyone who had given any help to the Maquis. Summary executions were carried out all over Brittany and the close of the operation coincided with the arrival of the allied troops who reversed the situation.

Finally, in Haute-Savoie, the joint operation undertaken by the Militia, the S.P.A.C. and the mobile reserve groups, with the support of the German army was a regular military expedition. Under the command of Darnand and Colonel Lelong, fifteen hundred militiamen were deployed in the region of Annecy, La Roche-sur-Foron and the Glières plateau, where four hundred Maquisards had been surrounded. The entire strength of the S.P.A.C. was involved. The Germans provided a formation of assault troops, including Bavarian Jägers, with artillery and air support. The battle went on for three weeks until the resistance forces were overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers.

Over and above those killed in the fighting, fifteen Maquisards were handed over to courts-martial, condemned to death and immediately executed. Four others died in prison as a result of torture. One more, a wounded man, was finished off on the spot. Two hundred prisoners were deported to Germany.

The next day, 4 February 1944, the Minister of the Interior handed his victory communiqué to the press:

'In the last few days a terrorist hide-out has been discovered in Haute-Savoie. Thirty-nine rebels, who had fled from their obligations under the labour service and had joined forces with communist bandits, have been killed in the course of the operation. The area has been completely cleaned up.'

Interviewed at greater length in the rue de Monceau on 11 February, Joseph Darnand told a press conference:

'I have decided to give all those who are loyally serving the state, the means of defence for which they have long been

waiting. I am convinced that I shall be able to obtain from the occupation authorities the arms necessary to wind up this struggle, which is becoming more and more difficult and dangerous. We have got to put an end to it. I agree that it will not be easy. People have got to understand that our action is essentially French.'

Thirty-nine French citizens who refused to enter German service were killed in battle, fifteen others shot, four more tortured to death, and two hundred deported; these were the results of which the Secretary-General for the Maintenance of Order saw fit to boast. Back in the days when he had received the Cross of the Legion of Honour from the hands of Binet-Valmer in the offices in the rue de Rome, Darnand was already inveighing against the Republic and republicans in the name of the *Action Française*. Now that he was Minister responsible for the Police and a lackey of the Germans, whose very uniform he was wearing, he was murdering his compatriots wholesale and publicly proclaiming that his action was essentially French. That was the kind of French action that the *Action Française* led to.

The eternal formula was once again heard at the foot of the Glières' plateau, to crown all the horrors, all the betrayals, all the despicable actions of which a traitor could boast. Joseph Darnand had clearly forgotten none of the lessons taught him by the late Léon Daudet and by Charles Maurras, who were still present in spirit at his side. Were any doubt still possible, his own words would be enough to establish the responsibility of his masters, as well as his own, for the long succession of events which drenched France in blood up to the morrow of the Liberation.

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## Republican Police

IN July and August 1944 the tables were turned with a vengeance. Threatened by encirclement between the jaws of the vice formed by the allied forces, and dogged in their rear by the irregulars of the Maquis, the enemy armies streamed back towards the frontiers.

A fortnight before the Leclerc division and the Americans entered Paris, the first groups of intelligence agents from London and Algiers had made contact with the Resistance in the capital and worked out with them ways of implementing the measures which had been already drawn up for the restoration of the legal régime. The Paris police strike, which had been decided on 15 August by the executive committee of the National Front, started on 19 August. Two thousand policemen turned the Cité barracks into a fortress and beat off the enemy's final assaults at heavy cost.

The units of the Militia, harassed from all sides, melted into thin air. Out of a paper strength of 45,000 men, Darnand could scarcely muster 10,000 under the protection of the German army. Then, under heavy guard, he evacuated his command post in the rue de Monceau on 16 August and led the remnants of his men to Sigmaringen, where they continued to melt away.

From 19 to 25 August Paris was without police. Down the empty streets rumbled convoys of fugitives making their way eastward and covering their retreat at each crossroads by bursts of sub-machine-gun fire. The crack of revolvers and

tommy-guns made a continuous reply. Patriots fell in their hundreds and memorial tablets to them on the house-fronts still testify today to the epic of the Liberation.

As soon as the provisional government had been installed, it decided on the replacement of the Prefect of Police and the Commissioner of the Sûreté Nationale. In the provinces, the government delegated authority to the Commissioners of the Republic, who were assisted by the prefects and the secretaries-general for the police. The Ministers had a formidable task before them. They had to restore the political institutions of the country, to bring back the various government departments and provide for their re-staffing, to check the activities of the unofficial police forces, to carry out the necessary purge among public officials and private citizens and to restore order throughout France.

In the twenty years between the two world wars, the subversive propaganda of 'a hundred per cent nationalism' had morally undermined a large part of the population to a far greater extent than would have been credited.

Far from serving as a lesson, the shock of defeat only aggravated the corruption where some were concerned. Simultaneously with its job of political and national recovery, the provisional government had therefore to give top priority to the restoration of public morale, with the aid of such officials as had remained loyal.

Luckily, these were in a large majority. The officials of both government departments and local services had, with few exceptions, stuck to their posts and carried on silently with their jobs for the good of the country. In every rank and in every field, they had done their bit to keep the machinery of government going. They had ensured the continuity of social and economic life. They had supported the efforts of the fighting Resistance as best they could and they had saved from chaos whatever could be saved.

The apparent passivity they had had to show had often cost them dear. Some of them had known the bitterness of



being suspected by both camps at once and others had been unjustly killed. Their job was not a showy one, and it was all too easy to misunderstand, but it was of vital importance, as the difficult times of the Liberation were to show.

Despite the collapse of the German forces and the irresistible advance of the Allied armies, there were still those in the higher ranks of the collaborationists who even in 1944 refused to admit the defeat of Germany. They assured their hearers in a whisper that the V 2, whose effects on London had been so disastrous, were now going to be launched on French cities too. They hinted that the German laboratories had developed a new secret weapon which was capable of reversing the military situation overnight. The worst they expected was a compromise; the building of some bridge, whether it was between Laval and Herriot or between Pétain and de Gaulle, under which they could at least find shelter until the storm had passed. In their hearts, like Pierre Laval, they wanted a German victory up to the last moment and never accepted defeat until it had struck home at the heart of Berlin.

In Paris, in Vichy and in the provinces, between two hundred and fifty and three hundred leading personalities, ministers, former ministers, heads of departments, senior officers and generals, stars of the press and radio and other highly-placed representatives of collaboration, caught out by the rapid turn of events, were arrested and flung into prison as the German armies pulled back. Others, who had been better informed or more far-seeing, fled abroad, though most of them were run down by the allied services or sooner or later gave themselves up to French justice. The astutest of them boldly bluffed their way back into one of the innumerable secret services; services so secret indeed that the echoes of their activities are still resounding in the columns of the world's press.

Arrests among the small fry were a daily affair for upwards

of three months: hundreds were rounded up in the Paris region and thousands in the provinces. The prisons and the concentration camps were full to bursting and the courts swamped. The Criminal Investigation departments of the Sûreté Nationale and the Préfecture of Police, with the assistance of the gendarmes and other regular police units, had the enormous job of supervising and co-ordinating all this work. But the Sûreté Nationale in Paris and the Criminal Investigation departments in the provinces were themselves temporarily disorganized and only too often they found themselves forestalled by the swarm of civil and military organizations which were acting on their own authority.

The trained personnel and the preponderating strength of the Paris police, the rapid regrouping of the State police forces and the centralization of the powers of command, nevertheless permitted the Minister of the Interior to re-establish his authority with reasonable speed and to enforce the rule of law throughout France.

The methodical rounding-up of collaborationists was bound, sooner or later, to bring the criminals of the O.S.A.R.N. into the police net and into the dock. One of the first to be caught was Jakubiez, the notorious killer who was Eugène Deloncle's trusty. Jakubiez made no bones about confirming his part in the murder of the Rosselli brothers at Bagnoles-de-l'Orne, and added several interesting new details. He said that after stabbing the dying Carlo Rosselli, he had taken the papers that were on him and handed them over to the Secretariat of the O.S.A.R.N. for forwarding to Italy as proof of the success of his mission. This was one more confirmation of the collusion between the Cagoule and fascism.

Locuty, the Clermont-Ferrand chemist, admitted for the second time his participation in the 'warning shots' at the Étoile. No less circumstantial confessions by their subordinates made it clear that Darnand, Dégans, Knipping, Clémox and all the General Staff of the Maintenance of Order were

guilty of moral, if not direct, complicity in the murders of Jean Zay and Georges Mandel. Annie Muraille, Moynier and Guichard, the murderers of Marx Dormoy, whom the Germans had freed from Valence prison in 1941, escaped into Spain by the skin of their teeth in 1944, at the same time as Fauran, Filiol and other killers of the Deloncle team. But Méténier, Corrèze, Faraut and Bouvyer soon fell into the hands of the police and were charged with treason as well as murder and conspiracy to murder.

There was no juridical way of reopening the proceedings against the Cagoule, which had been suspended in 1939, unless fresh and sufficiently conclusive evidence could be produced. The pre-1940 proceedings had brought out the crimes of all sorts that had accompanied the preparatory phases of the plot. But the seizure of power, as it had then been envisaged by the conspirators, could only be treated juridically as an intention. Thus, when the Sûreté Nationale reopened the inquiry in 1944, the aim was to establish first that the criminal activities of the Cagoule had continued during the occupation under the protection of the enemy and secondly that its declared intention of seizing power had become a fact from the moment when the founders of the revolutionary movement had grouped themselves around Marshal Pétain at Vichy.

Evidence was only too plentiful, but it had so many ramifications and involved so many prisoners that the judicial inquiry soon became too much for a single magistrate to handle. Though the various chains of facts had been inter-related from the start, the case had perforce to be split up between several examining magistrates, according to whether it was a question of crimes committed before or during the occupation, whether by the Cagoule itself or one of its subsidiary organs, the Militia, the S.P.A.C., the Section for Jewish Affairs or the department of Secret Societies. These last two branches alone accounted for a hundred and forty-five prisoners. The trials of Pétain, Laval, Darnand and of such

of the big collaborationists as it had been possible to arrest, were for the most part conducted individually.

Few of the thousands of people who owed the community an account of their actions during the crucial years finally managed to escape justice. Perhaps it would be too much to assert that individual guilt was always equitably determined or that collective responsibilities were always fully disentangled. So once again, less than ten years after the Liberation, a great wave of indulgence for the former champions of collaboration with Hitler has arisen and there are sheets which are publishing a regular column on 'the crimes of the Resistance'. The crimes which preceded these crimes by years have been forgotten before they have even been fully paid for.

Scarcely had he profited by the clemency of the Fourth Republic than Charles Maurras turned and rent it. Draping himself in the robes of a prosecutor, he started his public hate campaigns all over again and launched out in an indictment of the purge which, according to him, 'cost five hundred thousand victims, most of them innocent'. He demanded the head of the minister responsible, and the same scurrilous abuse reappeared under the same headlines as ever in the sheets that followed at his heels.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'The work of Maurras is based to some degree on a constant and declamatory disavowal of the dangerous or compromising disciples to whom it has given birth. This poisonous tree cannot bear its fruits to be recognized. One of the characteristics of "Maurrasism" has been to hustle off to the stake as heretics all those of its faithful who have made the mistake of taking too seriously what they had been taught. . . . "Maurrasism", running over as it is with the blood of scores of murdered Maquisards and scores of Militiamen killed in reprisal for them, is still thirsty. The insolent, the rancorous purity it lays claim to shrugs its crimes off on its spiritual sons, whom it has turned into abandoned children.'—André Rousseaux, *Le Figaro*, 22 January, 1947.

It would be futile to deny that acts of useless violence and crimes were committed before, during and after the Liberation by the men who were fighting for freedom against the Germans and their lackeys. To begin with, there were the moments of exasperation which led to counter-attacks and occasional reprisals by the Maquis from 1943 onwards; then feelings mounted even higher in the battles of 1944, when victory was changing sides. Finally, in the confusion of the last battles, there were the excesses of the toughs and criminals who are found in every period of unrest, who set themselves up as judges and who prolonged the reign of blood-lust on the other side. Such men soiled the name of the Resistance, and it can afford to abandon them without more ado to public obloquy. No one would dream of defending blood-lust, but it has got to be admitted that it is contagious.

If we are to set out, in time and order of importance, the real origins of the events that tore France between 1934 and 1944, we shall have to look back a little. Shocked by the cruelty which accompanied a swoop by the Maquis on the Militia of the Isère département in April 1944 a collaborationist journalist, who discreetly signed himself 'Three Stars', made a valuable contribution to the truth:

'It would be interesting to know how M. de Gaulle and his hangers-on at the B.B.C. will explain the massacre of Voiron. They will probably prefer not to refer to it at all. But the whole of France has been revolted and terrified. It gives one no pleasure to dwell on such scenes, but they are even more frightening by what they suggest than by what they directly reveal.

'It looks as if a vast wave of bestial madness was engulfing a section of our fellow-countrymen, as if we were no longer up against beings susceptible to reason or morality, men capable of discipline and with a minimum of civilization, but some resurgence of primitive brutality. And things are all the worse since methods of killing have improved out of all knowledge and Cain now operates with the Tommy-gun

to help him. . . .' (For 'Three Stars', Cain is evidently the Maquisard since, as everyone knows, the Militia had no tommy-guns.)

'We are not playing the moralist. The question is whether we have not been suddenly confronted with some psychic tuberculosis, some syphilis of the soul, born of who knows what deep-seated and incurable corruption. This war, in contrast to its predecessors, has up till now spared us any large-scale epidemics. It may well be that these have been transposed, as it were, into the moral domain and that a filterable virus even more subtle has attacked the conscience of men.'<sup>1</sup>

The spokesman of M. Marcel Déat was not far out in his diagnosis. It may have been one-sided but it was none the less sound. But it was nearest the mark when it came to the things he dared not mention.

Syphilis of the soul was abroad at Voiron in 1944, it is true, but it was also abroad in 1941 and 1942 during the massacres of Châteaubriant, of Orléans and of Nevers, at a time when the Resistance had not yet organized its first combat units. Since June, 1940 it had been raging in Paris, in the torture-chambers of the rue de la Pompe, the rue Lauriston and the Avenue Foch, and in the rue des Saussaies too, in the former home of the Sûreté Générale which the Gestapo and its Cagoulard-type assistants had this time turned into a real den of brigands. Long before that, Hitler and Mussolini had been victims of it, and so had their pale imitator Eugène Deloncle. All over France it had long been present, in latent form, in the veins of those who claimed to represent the King and among the partisans of 'a hundred per cent nationalism'.

From the beginning of the century everyone knew that the *Action Française* was working for the political education of an *élite* which was determined to impose on France a royalist view of the public weal. The King, according to this theory,

could only be restored by a *putsch*, and the *putsch* was to be carried out with the collusion of high military and civil personalities, as the climax of a violent public agitation.

'The first task of those who want to see the King back,' Charles Maurras wrote, 'will be to chuck the Deputies into the Seine and not to haul them out again before he is seated on his throne. . . .' Elsewhere he said: 'We shall not stop at murder. . . .'

Speaking of Paul Déroulède, who had offended him and whose patriotic theories ran counter to those of the *Action Française*, Maurras uttered a barely-veiled threat: 'We must come to an arrangement with his doctor,' he said. Adopting, naturally enough, the version of the crime current the day after Syveton's suicide, he paid the supposed murderers a heartfelt compliment: 'These men mean business.'

For Maurras, politicians who practised murder meant business. He dreamed of murder, he suggested it, he advised it. All his life this obsession with killing continued. It ran on without interruption, from the complacent doctor he had thought of for Déroulède to the 'kitchen knife' he suggested for Léon Blum. It linked up with and echoed the homicidal frenzy of Léon Daudet. Together, their daily incitements prepared the way for the crimes of the Cagoule, and right up to the moment of the 'sublime surprise' were egging on this 'corruption of the conscience'. Under the occupation Maurras relentlessly demanded the gallows for Gaullists, communists, freemasons and Jews. In 1925 he wanted to have the Minister of the Interior, Schramek, killed like a dog.<sup>1</sup> And in 1952 he was clamouring for the head of the republican

<sup>1</sup> The former Minister of the Interior, who was under house arrest near Cassis-sur-Mer in 1941 only escaped the fate M. Maurras had planned for him through the quick action of the Criminal Investigation department against the team of killers who had just murdered Dormoy and who were going to liquidate M. Schramek in the same way.

minister responsible for the post-liberation purge.<sup>1</sup> Killing was the supreme argument, the last word of all this political science.

In the eyes of these two men, who looked after their own lives so carefully, the lives of others did not count, nor did their country, despite their label of 'a hundred per cent nationalism', as long as there was any question of destroying a régime which did not meet their views. Throughout their lives they killed, and dreamed of killing, only by proxy. At the same time as they were publishing their grotesque theory of politico-police assassinations, they were applying it themselves by incitements whose efficacy there was no denying. From Jaurès to Jean Zay—not forgetting Roger Salengro, Marx Dormoy, Maurice Sarraut and Georges Mandel on the way—'a hundred per cent nationalism' had in a matter of years struck down four ministers and two leading representatives of the republican parties. And it was only by the skin of their teeth that A. Schramek, Léon Blum and Paul Reynaud escaped the massacre.

From the outset Charles Maurras set himself the task of educating a chosen *élite* for his revolution. He seems to have succeeded fairly well since he ended by enrolling under the banner of the fleur-de-lys a Marshal of France, on top of all the ministers and the academicians. But he did even better. With the help of Léon Daudet, he recruited, educated and rallied around the Deloncles and the Darnands an entire generation of mercenaries of treason and of crime.

There is no need to search any further. It was through the pages of *L'Action Française* that there oozed into France for



twenty years this virus of mental hydrophobia, of psychic tuberculosis, this syphilitic poison of the soul about which the collaborationist journalist held forth so learnedly in 1944 when he wrote of the Voiron massacres. There was the treason. There is the indictment which has not yet been drawn up but which one day may have to be brought into court if one may judge from some recent significant warnings.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that the vicious exploitation of political passion easily transforms some people into the worst kind of criminals. But it also poses for the police an enormous problem of crime prevention in a form that has been too little considered up to now.

At its Second Congress in Paris in September 1950, the International Society of Criminology put on its agenda the question of factors that promote crime, both individual and collective. One feels that the cases of the Gestapo torturers and their imitators, and of the hardened criminals of the Cagoule, call for the future attention of the international jurists no less than that of the French courts. Perhaps too the story of the *coup d'état* that failed should impress itself more than it has done on the attention of the educationalists who will one day be faced with the hard task of writing an impartial history of France.



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